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["MY HEAVEN! SHE WILL BE KILLED!" CRIED RUPERT, AS FAIDEN DASHED IN FRONT OF THE HEAVY ORBY MARE.]

BAR SINISTER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

WHEN General Gerard Sydney returned to England from India after an absence of some thirty years not one of his old chums and acquaintances knew him. Even his own and only sister, the Honourable Mrs. St. John Oliver, declared emphatically that had she met him on "the sweet, shady side of Pall Mall" face to face, she would not have recognised him.

Now this was not surprising, seeing that when Gerard left England he was twenty-eight, a tall, upright dashing young officer of Engineers, with dark blue eyes, a drooping, tawny moustache, fair hair, and a clear, red and white complexion that any miss in her teens might have envied and longed for. When he returned after his lengthy sojourn 'neath the baking rays of an Eastern sun, the

change was radical and complete. He was still tall and erect, but painfully spare and worn, and his skin had assumed a golden tint, presumably from the effect the climate had had on his liver, which report said was in no end of a bad way. The tawny silky moustache, once so much admired by the young ladies, had become a grizzled brush on his upper lip, and his closely-cropped hair was iron-grey, like his bushy brows that overhung a pair of eyes, blue still, but in a yellow setting of eyeball that materially detracted from their beauty. His once sunny, good-natured expression had flown, and was replaced by a melancholy look, that gave to his bronzed, thin face, an ascetic appearance, and it soon became known in clubland that General Sydney was a hard-hearted cynic, and at times morose to a degree.

However, he had come back rich from the Indies, nobody quite knew how rich, so everybody was ready to welcome him warmly, including Julia Oliver, who was the warmest of all. Now Julia's warmth was prompted by a somewhat mercenary motive. At the age of twenty-five she had married the

youngest son of a blue-blooded but impoverished Earl, and this sprig of nobility owned not a penny wherewith to bless himself, his wife and the numerous progeny that she bore him year after year with clockwork like regularity, until ten round chubby girl faces were gathered around the scantily-spread board, and ten hungry mouths opened after the fashion of young birds and required to be filled.

Ten girls! Think of it. Ten females to be brought up or dragged up in some kind of a fashion, dressed, educated, launched on the world, and only fit to be launched in one way on the troublous and oftentimes dangerous sea of matrimony. Mrs. Oliver would often look round on the ten fair, blooming, unconcerned faces of her daughters, with a feeling that was near akin to despair, for her income was only five hundred pounds a-year, and on that scanty sum, unaided by anything extraneous, had the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Oliver to live, and bring up and advance their ten offspring.

It was hard work, for they were closely allied with several rich and noble families

and some sort of an outside show had to be made, decent gown to be worn when they called upon the Countess of Thine and my Lord of That; while once a year, by a desperate superhuman effort, they gave a reception, and invited their grand relatives to enter the portals of their modest abode, which was of the Lilliputian order, and according to Mrs. Oliver, "on the edge of Belgravia." It was so very much on the edge that it would have been more truthful to describe it as Pimlico pure and proper; but pride forbade, so the Oliver letters came addressed "Belgravia," and the Oliver parcels bore the same aristocratic word; and by long haggling with the truth they had brought themselves to honestly believe that they really did reside in the most aristocratic and exclusive quarter of London, and said so with a cool effrontery that first astonished and afterwards amused acquaintances.

Mrs. Oliver, though distinctly a match-making and manoeuvring mamma, had failed to get off any of her daughters.

The youngest was but twelve years. It is true; but the eldest, alas! blackaday! was thirty-one, and plain as that. The other eight came in between "Heads" and "Tails," as the eldest and the youngest Miss Oliver were rather inelegantly termed; while the beauty of the family was undoubtedly Letty, the fifth daughter, who, despite her great good looks was still a maiden unwooed, unwood, though in her twenty-second year.

Her mother said, of course, it was her want of opportunities; and those nestings of pretty gowns and becoming hats, etc., that richer but less well-favoured girls possessed in abundance.

Letty secretly thought so too; though, to do her justice, she never gave vent to her opinions nor lost her sweet temper because she remained on the parent stem and was not plucked by some man to wear in his bosom as his nearest and dearest.

All the girls were fair, with white skins, and flaxen hair. Some had blue eyes, some hazel; while Letty, and Betty, the youngest, had violet eyes—large full eyes, with a fringing of jetty lashes which enhanced their beauty, and lay like a dusky shadow on dainty cheek.

It was with a feeling of delight that Mrs. Oliver hailed her brother's advent to England, notwithstanding it was seldom she had heard from him, and that some six months before he wrote to inform her that when he did come to England he should bring his daughter with him. This news fell like a thunderclap upon the good matron. In a few brief letters she had received from him during his sojourn abroad, never once had he so much as hinted that he was married, and now—now, when she had been building castles in the air, and hoping he would adopt at least one of her bonny girls, to find an avalanche descending upon her, came the news that he possessed a daughter of his own and was bringing her home with him!

For a week Mrs. Oliver succumbed to the blow and took to her bed. After that period she recovered, and, being a woman of action, wrote to her brother expressing surprise and asking for particulars of his marriage. All she received in reply was a laconic letter to the effect that his daughter was just seventeen, and that her mother had been dead some years.

With this scanty information she had to rest content and possess her soul in patience as best she could until her brother and his daughter arrived in England.

The first intimation she received of their arrival was a few lines asking her to come and see them at a hotel in Bond Street, an invitation which she accepted readily, going to pay the visit dressed in all her smartest clothes, and taking Letty and Maria, her eldest daughter, with her.

"Now, dears," she said, admonishingly, as they neared Bond Street, "pray be careful what you say and do before your uncle. Don't

offend him. Remember how much may depend upon his goodwill and favour."

"I shan't do anything to offend him, you may be sure, mother," replied Maria, rather sourly, in a way which implied that if any one did rub their rich relative the wrong way it would be Letty. "I am extremely anxious to benefit by my uncle's riches. I shall be everything that you could wish me to be. I shall take care not to laugh at him or ridicule his Indian-like tastes, and as I am his goddaughter" (Miss Oliver had opened her eyes on this troublous world and given vent to her first squeals a few weeks before her uncle left England, and he had taken upon himself the responsible post of sponsor at his sister's urgent request) "he may do something grand for me, or at any rate something more than he will for the others."

"My firm belief is," observed Letty, coolly, who had been engaged in admiring her elegant figure in the shop windows, which reflected her full length as none of the paltry little glasses in their house at Loftus street, Pimlico, did, "that he won't trouble himself at all about us."

"My dear," expostulated her mother.

"Why should he?" she went on in the same style, still keeping her eyes on the shop windows, and dividing her admiration about equally between her own reflection and the pretty things displayed therein. "He didn't during the thirty years he spent abroad. He never sent us any of the thousand and one things India is famous for, not a bit of Benares brackish water, not a yard of Dacca muslin, not a carved figure—"

"What do you know about Indian things, I should like to know?" interrupted Maria, snappishly.

"You are quite welcome to; just about as much as you do," responded the lovely blonde, tranquilly. "I have read about them, and I have seen them" displayed in the shop windows.

"Pooh! the real things are ever so much more lovely," sniffed Miss Oliver, contemptuously, as though to show her superior knowledge and annihilate her younger sister, of whom she was insanely jealous, partly because of Letty's beauty, which made her own homeliness more conspicuous, but chiefly because some three or four years before a penniless, plain, utterly detrimental lieutenant in a marching regiment had paid her some slight attentions, no one could ever quite make out why, until introduced to Letty, when he immediately transferred his admiration, barely deserting poor Maria for "metal more attractive."

"You speak with authority," smiled Letty, ality. "Only that, of course, I am behind the scenes, and know you have never put a foot out of England, I should quite think you had passed your long life in India."

"Rubbish. Don't be silly," retorted Maria, who resented the allusion to her age with increased acerbity.

"I think it is you who are silly," as usual, replied the younger sister, with a touch of cool contempt; that rendered the other speechless with rage, and made her grind her teeth after a very ugly fashion peculiar to her.

"My dears, my dears," exclaimed Mrs. Oliver, sharply, "be kind enough to let us have no quarrelling now. It is a critical time, I am very—nay, most extremely anxious that you should make an agreeable and favourable impression upon your uncle. You certainly will not if you go in looking ruffled and angry, finishing the tag end of your blushing covertly in their rooms. Pray calm yourselves, and for once be friendly and united for the common good. It would be a great thing for us if Gerard should fancy one of you and adopt you."

"Why should he?" laughed Letty, who never allowed an angry or discontented expression to mar for long the sunny loveliness of her face. "He has one of his own. Surely that is enough; perhaps too much. Who can tell?"

"She will want a companion," observed Mrs. Oliver, diplomatically. "I shall suggest to him that it would be of immense advantage for her to have with her constantly a girl of her own age, or perhaps a few years older," with a fond look at Letty, "who is thoroughly au fait with London society, who could quietly put her right when she was likely to make a mistake; advise her about her dress, and a hundred little things that would show to the beau monde she was not used to English ways and customs."

"Perhaps she is used," hazarded Maria, who had stopped grinding her teeth, to reflect upon the probability of her uncle presenting her with a new gown to take the place of the somewhat shabby garment of last year's cut and hue that she was reluctantly wearing. "Uncle Gerard may have had her down at Calcutta office. Do you know, was she there, mother?"

"I don't know. Your uncle did not tell me of every place to which he took his daughter," replied Mrs. Oliver, rather shortly. She did not care for her daughters to be aware of how little she really knew about her niece and her movements since the hour of her birth.

"Here we are," she added briskly, as they arrived at the hotel, and proceeded to inquire if General Gerard was within.

CHAPTER II.

ONE Averted official having made it his business to find out that the General was in his sitting-room, they were handed over to a small person in green with a superabundance of buttons decorating his chest, and a few moments later they were ushered into a charmingly-appointed room, where two grey-headed old gentlemen of military aspect were conversing together, while near the window playing with some foreign birds was a young lady.

For a moment Mrs. Oliver hesitated. Which of these tall spare grey-headed men was her brother.

His blue eyes settled the question, as he turned them on her.

"My dear Julie, this is really very kind of you to come so soon," exclaimed the General, coming forward to greet his sister, by whom he was affectionately embraced, though he hardly seemed to have anticipated or desired that mark of affection.

"My dear Gerard," she replied warmly, "I could not rest until I had seen you, and made the acquaintance of my niece," and she looked towards the girl, who, having put her gaily-feathered pets back in their cage, came forward to her father's side.

"Saidee," he said, very gently, "this is your aunt. I hope she and you will be very good friends," and then after a pause, "and your cousins," and he in his turn looked at his nieces, who, taking it as an invitation, advanced and kissed him, performing the same ceremony with Saidee when Mrs. Oliver released her from a close and maternal embrace.

"I'm sure I hope we shall," said Miss Sydney, brightly. "I have been looking forward to meeting you, aunt Julie, and my cousins."

"And we also," responded the matron kindly. "We hope to see a great deal of you at Loftus street, my dear. You must look upon it quite as your own home. Come when you like and as often as you like. You may be quite sure of one thing, there will always be a very warm welcome for you."

"Thanks. You are kind. I shall oblige myself often. Won't it be nice, father, now, for me, appealing to him, 'to have some one of my own age to go about with and chat to?'"

"I suppose it will," he agreed; but there was a note of doubt in his voice which made his sister marvel not a little.

"Julia," he went on, seemingly with an effort, turning to the gentleman who had been standing silently in the background watching

these greetings between kith and kin—"this is an old friend of yours."

"Really?"

The one word was full of doubt and surprise as Mrs. Oliver turned her still handsome blue eyes on the tall stranger. Surely that wiry figure, that thin, bronzed face had never been seen by her before!

"You don't remember me, I see," he said with a pleasant laugh. "It is five-and-thirty years since we met; and you were fifteen then."

With a rush came recollection at the sound of his voice.

"Oh, you are Cowper Rodney?" she exclaimed; and though she was past fifty, and the mother of ten bounding girls, she blushed from brow to chin, for the man had been her first lover, and refused—though he cared for her more than for anyone else, even the man she afterwards married—because he had neither wealth nor title.

"Yes. And yet—you forget me?"

There was unconscious pathos in the man's voice as he uttered these words, and looked at the only woman he had ever truly loved, and for whose sake he had remained a bachelor.

"A long winter in India, a letter a fellow wonderfully," put in the General. "We can't remain young and handsome all our lives, Cowper."

"No, I know; and I'm not the good-looking fellow I was when I went away; and yet, to have been forgotten by Julia!" he said, sorrowfully.

Mrs. Oliver found this glance and his regret a little embarrassing. He had remained true to his first love, to his youthful ideal of all that was charming in womanhood. She had married a man of totally different calibre and appearance, had become the mother of many, and the care and troubles of married life on a small income had knotted nearly the whole of her lifetime out of her nature, leaving her eminently practical and matter-of-fact, to be plunged eagerly into a conversation with her brother about India, and the loveliness of his daughter.

To her remarks about India he responded quickly, showing his intimate knowledge of all he said about the country, its men, manners and customs; but when she touched upon the subject of his daughter he became reticent, and displayed little interest in her remarks; while, when he spoke of her dead mother, she became deadly pale under all the deep bronzy on his cheek, and like a sensitive hermit crab, retired into his shell, and refused to discuss the matter altogether.

Mrs. Oliver was nothing if not diplomatic. She was a clever, far-seeing woman; and she realised at once that there was something painfully unpleasant to her brother in any mention or allusion to Saldie's mother. She was dying with curiosity to know all about it. She felt convinced there was some mystery connected with her brother's long concealed marriage; but she wisely refrained from showing it, knowing there was too much at stake, and that she dared not risk offending General.

But there was one thing she was quite sure of, and that was that Saldie's mother had been an Eastern woman.

In no respect did the girl resemble her father. She was plump, with a little yet rounded figure, and that sinuous grace of movement unknown to women of northern nations, yet very marked in Indian women.

Her hands and feet were small and beautifully shaped; her head was well poised, and crowned with a mass of blue-black hair; her features were delicate, save and except the lips, which were too full for perfect beauty; and her skin, though rosy and tinged with a pomegranate hue on either cheek, was dark, and there was a gold tinge in it often seen in the skin of Asiatics, which told of an admixture of warmer blood than English in her veins.

Her eyes were simply glorious—large soft eyes, fringed with a double row of jetty, curling lashes—eyes that were well shaped,

well placed, of the darkest brown, looking black in some lights—eyes that would have made a plater face attractive, and rendered hers lovely.

There was no doubt about it, Mrs. Oliver concluded after this first glance at Saldie's glowing pigments face, her unknown sister-in-law must have been a native, of what type or class she did not know, but she hoped she had at least been the daughter of a Rajah, and that noble blood, even if Eastern, flowed in the girl's veins.

"Come and look at my birds," said Saldie to her cousin, soon after the first greetings were over, approaching the gilded cage where her little feathered pets were crusting up against each other to get that warmth which they would never find in chilly England. "This is a mango-bird, Saldie's favorite; and these are waxbills, they are Saldie's favorites; and here is his chattering and here his kitten-song; and these humming-birds are his favourites and his dearest. Chatterbox, little love, you sing too much," was a tiny creature, an avadavat piped out a sweet little note, which died away all the sooner.

"You are fond of birds?" smiled Letty, as her cousin raved out on a strange jargon of Hindustani and English.

"I love them," said the little Anglo-Indian; with altogether unnecessary fervor and passion. "I love to feel their soft, warm, tiny bodies nestling against my breast, to feel their little heads as they peck the food from between my lips."

"Do you tame them all?" inquired Maria, who had been silently yet anxiously appraising the probable value of the lovely gold embroidery with which Saldie's cashmere dress was lavishly trimmed.

"Yes," replied Saldie, her large eyes lighting for a moment on Maria's plain face; and then travelling further and resting on Letty's more attractive one. "I never tame more than a week. They are all perfectly tame now," and throwing wide the door of the gilded prison, she called each one by its name, and the little creatures came hopping and flying towards her, some resting on her shoulders and bosom, some on her head, the little mango-bird perching on her left wrist.

Just at that moment the room-door was opened, and the small party running over with buttons unbuttoned.

General Sir Roger Rodney and Mr. Rodney.

Without the slightest indication of embarrassment, but with an easy grace of manner and movement which her cousin secretly envied her, Saldie went forward to greet these new guests, her feathered friends still retaining their places; and as she went slowly forward her long fair-coloured dress, with its gorgeous golden embroidery trailing behind her, gliding and gleaming in the sunlight, she stooped on her dusky head and kissed in her wonderful dusky eyes, she looked like an Eastern prophetess—lovely, yet a little uncanny.

"Ah, Miss Saldie," exclaimed the Baronet, "at your old tricks, beatching all the birds. Lucky thing for you, you didn't live in the middle ages."

"Why, what did they do in the middle ages to people who loved birds?" she asked; in this liquid dulcet tones that were so pretty with the slight foreign accent that added but yet another charm to them.

"Gave them more," said the young man who was with them, quickly. "Don't listen to any of my father's nonsense, Miss Saldie. You know he always teased you."

"Yes, I remember when we were at Allahabad he made my life perfectly miserable," with an arch glance at the handsome old soldier.

"Now I vow that is too bad," he exclaimed, with a hearty laugh. "No one spoiled you as I did. I appeal to you, Sydney, didn't I spoil your little girl?"

"I must say I think you did," smiled the General.

"And I'm going to spoil you now," pulling a bulky white parcel from his pocket. "What do you say to some mounds, little fairy?"

"Why, that you are just the dearest dear in the world," she exclaimed, her eyes gleaming with childish gleam as she clutched the parcel, and, tearing it open, set her white teeth in a round of the luscious Indian sweetmeat.

"The dearest save one, I hope," murmured Rupert Rodney, in a low tone, but not so low but that Maria's sharp ears caught the word.

Saldie gave him a look, an indescribable look, half-childlike and innocent, half-womanly and passionate; then she said, demurely.

"Let me introduce you to my aunt and cousins."

Both the Baronet and his son shook hands with the Oliver, and declared themselves charmed to meet them, and the younger man's clear blue eyes rested for a minute admiringly on Letty's lovely blonde face; then they travelled on, and glided, themselves, with notable persistency on Saldie's who appeared totally unconscious of the severe scrutiny to which she was subjected.

When tea was brought in, she arranged a little table near the flower-filled window for her aunt, father, the Baronet, and his brother, Major Rodney, and then, in the most distant corner, she settled a larger one for herself, Letty, Maria, and young Rodney, saying as she did so.

"We can say what we like over here. They won't hear us," nodding her dusky head towards her elders.

This was all done with a cool, unconventional effrontery, that would have been bold and unmaidenly in an English girl, and yet seemed a perfectly natural performance for the little Anglo-Indian, and what might have been expected from a girl with such passionate eyes, such a romantic, uncommon appearance.

"Now tell me everything you have done since we last met," she said, after having ministered to the creature's comforts of her guests, and loading their plates with all kinds of dainty cakes, the like of which poor Maria, who generally stayed at home giving place to her younger and better-looking sisters, and who seldom attended reception or ball, had never dreamed of, and which she attacked and demolished with gusto; and as Saldie spoke, she laid one little olive-hued hand on Rupert's wrist, with a pretty caressing gesture.

"Let me see," he said, with an assumption of careless coolness which perhaps he did not feel, "where was that? At Meerut?"

"No, indeed!" she exclaimed, quickly, while a deeper red tinged her cheeks. "Have you forgotten?"

"I am afraid I have," he acknowledged, possibly because Letty and Maria were watching them and showing some slight trace of surprise at their cousin's embarrassed manner.

"Bah! An Englishman is capable of forgetting anything, even his own mother," said the girl, withdrawing her hand with a petulant movement that showed she was both hurt and annoyed.

"I never get a chance of forgetting mine," he sighed, with a comical grimace, "She never lets me!"

"How is Lady Rodney?" inquired the little hostess, with an assumption of that demure air which she could adopt so quickly, and which as very prettily on her young shoulders; "I hope well."

"She says she is very ill," smiled her son, "and that a long residence in India had ruined her liver."

"I suppose the climate has a prejudicial effect upon Europeans, and only really agrees with the natives; or at any rate with those who have an admixture of Indian blood in their veins," observed Maria, just a trifle spitefully, and pointing her words by a glance at her cousin; for she thought Saldie was monopolising the handsome young baronet in embryo too much, and ought to let her have a chance. She knew all about the Rodney

family, and was well aware that they were very wealthy and possessed two or three historic old houses in different parts of England; and as Rupert was remarkably good-looking in addition to all his other attractions, she felt it was an opportunity not to be lost, and would decidedly have preferred to hold his hand herself to seeing anyone else do it.

"Don't know, I am sure," replied the young man, giving Maria a keen glance, and putting her down mentally as a spiteful old maid. "Always agrees very well with me."

"You are probably right," said Saidee, quietly, but her large eyes, too, rested on Maria's washed-out looking face with an expression that was not lost upon Letty.

"Now do tell me where you last met," exclaimed the blonde, vivaciously, "I am longing to hear? Saidee, you remember, I am sure, even if Captain Rodney forgets?" and she looked from one to another with a pretty air of inquiry that the young man was obliged to own to himself was very charming.

"Yes, I remember," acknowledged Miss Sydney, a little smile parting the full red lips. "Yes, so do I," cried Rodney. "It was at Lady Easton's ball in Calcutta, and you behaved very badly to me, Miss Sydney."

"I behaved badly to you? Oh, no."

"Oh, yes."

"How?"

"Yes, how?" put in Letty. "You must particularize."

"I can easily," he declared.

"Then do it," ordered the smiling blonde, imperiously.

"He can't," cried Saidee. "I have never behaved badly to him."

"Oh, Miss Sydney! You were absolutely cruel."

"I to you?"

The girl's tone and manner were so unguarded that they plainly betrayed to her cousins the fact that she felt something more than friendship for the handsome, smiling young man by her side. Perhaps he noticed it too, for he said, rather hurriedly,—

"Is it possible that you forget how you gave six of my dances away to other fellows?"

"But you took them all!" she exclaimed with delicious *naïveté*. "I had not one left when you gave me back my programme, and I had promised six before I came into the room."

"It was very cruel," he murmured, plaintively. "Our last night together."

"I will make it up the next time we meet," she said, earnestly, as though she took the whole matter *au sérieux*, once more laying her hand lightly on his.

"Mind you do," laughed Letty. "You will have plenty of opportunities in town. Don't let her forget or break that promise, Captain Rodney."

"I don't mean to," he said, meaningly, smiling back at the lovely blonde, who had already gained his goodwill by her good-tempered, apparently disinterested championship of his cause.

But Letty was deeper than anyone gave her credit for, and, like her mother, was a far-seeing woman.

She guessed at once that young Rodney and her cousin were undeclared lovers, and she saw he admired Saidee greatly.

But "there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip." Failing Saidee for any reason, she might have a chance of being "my lady" and wife to this handsome, lovable young officer, and accordingly she determined to play her cards well and win for herself this trump; and poor Saidee—unconventional, innocent Saidee—was no match for her town-bred, elder cousin, and fell at once into the snares spread for her, taking a great liking to Letty, and determining to make a friend and companion of her.

"You will come and see us to-morrow, my dear?" said Mrs. Oliver, as she rose to go. "Just to luncheon in a friendly way. There are eight more cousins for you to know."

"I shall be very glad to," said Saidee, simply.

And then her aunt extended the invitation to the gentlemen of the party, most of whom accepted it, notably Rupert, and went on her way homeward rejoicing; yet not quite clear as to how edible things for the morrow's luncheon-party were to be procured.

CHAPTER III.

By herculean efforts and an immense expenditure of strength Mrs. Oliver managed by 1.30 the following day to have a dainty and presentable luncheon on the table at her house "on the edge of Belgravia," and she, her husband, four of her daughters, her niece, General Sir Roger Rodney, his brother and son, sat down to it.

General Sydney was not present, "important business" having taken him citywards, but Major Rodney, who was an old comrade and companion in arms of his, and therefore privileged, had brought Saidee in a hansom to Loftus Street.

She was looking very lovely in a thin white gown belted round the zone with a curious Eastern girdle of many colours; and Letty, watching through her thick lashes, saw young Rodney's eyes very often seek those dusky houri-like ones of Saidee's. Of course the beauty had contrived to plant herself alongside the Captain, equally of course she had given her mother a hint to put her cousin as far from the gallant soldier as possible. These manoeuvres had been faithfully carried out, and yet Letty was hardly happy. She had no power to control other people's eyes, and Miss Sydney's were most eloquent.

She did not say much during luncheon. Perhaps the novelty of her position amid so many recently known relatives weighed on her a little, or perhaps the fact of her having been introduced to eight more cousins, all bearing a strong family resemblance—such a strong family resemblance—one to another perplexed her.

At any rate she was very quiet and aided the conversation not at all, only answering in monosyllables when addressed, and Mrs. Oliver was most assiduous in her endeavours to include her niece in every topic started. It was different later on, when they all went out in the Lilliputian garden which was a veritable bower, aglow with lovely roses and other gorgeous flowers, for nine of the Misses Oliver devoted a portion of each day to beautifying and tending the few yards of earth which lay at the back of the house, and with the most happy results. They dug and delved early and late, they sowed and they pruned, they rolled and they watered the few yards of grass until it was emerald green, and as smooth as any nobleman's well-tended lawn. They had put up a little summer-house which was gay with the purple blossoms of the wisteria, the bald, unsightly back of the house was covered with clinging ivy, and the graceful leaves of the Virginian creeper; geraniums and fuchsias with their pretty blossoms were in every available nook and corner, and two or three giant trees, half built into the garden-wall, sheltered the little spot from the too prying eyes of inquisitive neighbours. Altogether it was charming, and a great surprise to their visitors. Letty, of course, did not help in the gardening, lest her fair skin might be tanned or her white hands spoiled.

"This is delightful," exclaimed Saidee, with a sigh of pleasure, as she tossed some pillows belonging to the smart wicker chairs, somewhat to her cousin's secret horror, on the smooth sward, and sank on them in a negligently graceful attitude which Letty secretly determined to practise at the earliest opportunity. "I did not think in London anyone had a garden."

"Very few people have," laughed Captain Rodney, "and this is a triumph of loveliness over smoke and other drawbacks too numerous to be mentioned."

"Yes, it is pretty," assented Letty, by the way of accepting some of the praise herself. "But we spend a great deal of time and labour on it, more than perhaps we ought."

"Yes, more than perhaps we ought," mimicked Betty, a long-legged, red-wristed, short frooked girl of twelve, the youngest of the daughters, and a regular *enfant terrible*, of whom Letty was secretly afraid, for she exposed the beauty's shifts, and ridiculed her little airs and affectations in a merciless fashion whenever Mrs. Oliver was not present.

That good lady had a summary way of dealing with her troublesome last born. When she offended she was promptly packed off to bed minus luncheon, dinner or tea, as the case might be. Betty was growing, and possessed a very healthy appetite, therefore she learnt to control her sharp tongue before her mother. Mrs. Oliver, on that bright summer afternoon, had remained in the stuffy, shabby little drawing room with her husband and the Baronet and his brother, thinking that perhaps the young folk would get on better alone than with their elders.

So Betty the Terrible was in full force, and was particularly bitter because she and five of her sisters had been excluded from the luncheon-table, and participation of the rare dainties which had graced it.

"I'm out here often by six o'clock in the morning coarsening my hands by digging, and reddening my face by exerting myself. But Letty," with a wicked look at the beauty, who was trembling inwardly, though she managed to maintain a calm and untroubled exterior, "she never gets up before nine o'clock, and then it takes her a good two hours to curl her fringe, and put on the cream of roses and *crème imperial* to make herself beautiful, and to baton herself into her tight frocks."

"It cannot possibly interest Captain Rodney to know what I do," said Letty, lolly, with one scathing glance at her audacious younger sister, "so you had better keep your confidences for someone else."

"Anything connected with you interests me," exclaimed the young man gallantly, "and I am quite sure your little sister's wrong in what she says."

"Like most children she talks a great deal of rubbish," remarked Letty disdainfully.

"You are a naughty little monkey," cried unconventional Saidee, looking quite angrily at the culprit, who saw she had made a mistake for once in a way, and bitterly regretted it, "and untruthful too, for your sister puts nothing on her skin. It is just lovely. Isn't it?"—turning to Rodney—"so fair and smooth."

"Miss Oliver has a fine complexion," agreed the young man readily and with warmth, chiefly because he was very good-natured and wished to soothe her unjustly wounded feelings, and not because he really admired it so much, because, being rather fair himself, he not unnaturally admired women with dusky eyes and rich-looking dark complexions. However, Letty did not know this, and so was pleased beyond expression, and a smile lit up her face with unusual brilliance.

"I think it is delicious," said the Anglo-Indian. "It is to me. I am tired of olive skins and pomegranate cheeks. And you, Betty," looking severely at the half unregenerate and somewhat defiant culprit, "you are jealous because your cheeks are red, and your funny little nose is red, and the rest of your face is covered with brown spots like those one sees on a cowslip. I don't know what you call them in England."

"Freckles," announced Maria severely, though all the others save Betty and Saidee laughed.

"Fairly hit," laughed the Captain, enjoying the *enfant terrible's* discomfiture immensely.

"Elizabeth," remarked her eldest sister, with a stilted assumption of dignity that was highly ridiculous, "you have disgraced yourself. You had better retire to your chamber."

But Betty, who did not think much of poor

plain Marta, pulled her pretty, if freckled, face into a comical grimace, and strutted off to a corner where a heap of Derbyshire spar glittered in the sunlight, and sitting on it proceeded to tear a spray of fuchsia to pieces, while she pouted furiously.

"I don't know what we shall do with that child," groaned Miss Oliver, dismally. "She becomes worse every day."

"It is her high spirits," said Letty, sweetly, wishing to pose as the injured amiable one before the guests. "She does not mean to be rude."

"Still she is," said Saidee, decidedly, "she ought to go to school."

"Mother cannot afford that," sighed the beauty, who never pretended to be rich or to hide their poverty, because she found it answer much better not to.

Presents were not rare at the Lilliputian Loftus-street house. People were always ready to beg the lovely Miss Oliver to accept a present of fruit, or flowers, or game; and many elderly ladies, whom she had fascinated by her amiability and resignation to the inevitable, had given her more substantial gifts—hence the charming toilet she was able to wear on most occasions. And in truth Letty was very sweet-tempered, and did all she could to help her less fortunate sisters; and if now and then she did feel as though she would like to slap Betty's blooming, saucy, freckled face, or take Betty's shoulders one in either hand, and shake her till the child felt dazed and silly, or pinch her rather bony arms, who can wonder? for a more tormenting little monkey never existed, or one better versed in every art of petty annoyance.

"It would be a relief to you to be rid of her sometimes, I suppose?" observed her cousin, questioningly.

"Well, yes, it would," acknowledged Letty, half reluctantly, not quite knowing what the other was driving at. "Though, of course, we love her, Saidee, despite her faults."

"Oh, of course," agreed Saidee, coolly, "that is understood. Still, when we are settled in the country I will have her to stay with me, and Ayala shall look after her and keep her in order."

"Do you not mean to stay in town then?" exclaimed Letty, a note of dismay in her voice, as she saw her bright visions of drives in the parks, stalls at the opera, tickets for Hurlingham, the Lyric, the Botanical Gardens, and fifty other places fade away.

"No," said Miss Sydney, with a little rippling laugh full of music, and a shake of her dusky head. "London will not suit me. It is too close, too dense. Everything seems packed against everything else; there is no sense of freedom, no delicious freshness in the air, so few green trees and lovely flowers. All seems bald and bare like a vast prison, and the heat—poof!" and she stretched her shapely arms, gleaming with an olive tint through the thin sleeves of her gown, above her head, with a gesture which suggested a sense of oppression.

"You ought to be well accustomed to the heat," remarked Rodney, whose blue eyes had been resting on her face with an inquiring half-uneasy expression, "you had plenty of it in India."

"Too much," she responded, promptly. "I feel withered and dried up with the heat. I have heard Scotland is a lovely place, that there are great green hills there, and tumbling streams that rush down the mountain-side, flinging the white foam on every fern, and when they reach the bottom flow on like a silver ribbon through verdant straths into the lochs and rivers, and that on the summit of a heather-clad mountain the air is keen and exhilarating."

"It is glorious," assented the young man. "Only remember, Miss Sydney, that this is June, about the hottest month here in England. You haven't tried our winter yet, and I am inclined to think it will try you, coming from the tropics; and as to Scotland, it's much worse; and in the Highlands, of course,

it is still colder. Why, to hear the wind whistle on a winter's night at Stromes Ferry is enough to chill you to the bone, even if you are warm and sheltered in a ferryman's hut."

"I want bracing," she told him, her large velvety eyes gazing into his.

"Possibly. Still you can have too much of a good thing, and if you take my advice you will not persuade the General to set up his household gods in the North."

"Of course I will take advice," she said, with an unwonted gentleness and docility which was very charming in one usually so self-willed and independent. "Still I long to see Scotland, the land of Scott and Burns."

"You can go there this autumn for a time. You will be delighted. Some of the mountains are snow-capped, some seemingly dressed in richest carmine, some purple with heather, others beautifully green."

"Oh, it must be a grand land!" she exclaimed, ecstatically, clasping her slender hands together.

"So it is; but awfully cold in winter. Now," he went on diplomatically, "if you were to persuade the General to live in our county."

"Which is your county?" she inquired.

"Somersetshire. It is a lovely part of England, and warm in winter."

"Very lovely?"

"Very. Well-wooded hills, charming valleys, through which the rivers wind, plenty of good society, and heaps of old historic houses."

"It sounds very nice," observed Marta, who scarcely ever set a foot out of London, and, consequently, had an inordinate desire to live in the country.

"Charming!" cooed Letty; "and your home is there?" fixing her violet eyes on him.

"Yes."

"Do tell us something about it," she smiled, bending towards him with a graceful entreating gesture.

"Yes, do," echoed Saidee, raising herself on one elbow, and fixing her eyes too on him.

"There isn't much to tell," he laughed.

"Oh, do!" exclaimed the beauty, holding up a slender forefinger reprovingly, for she had made herself acquainted as far as she could with his family history and his father's possessions. "I hear Fairlea Castle is one of the most interesting ruins in England."

"Is it a castle, a real old castle?" queried Betty, who had crept up from her place of exile amongst the stones, and plumped down on her knees beside his chair, laying her hand on his arm as she did so; and all her sisters were so intent upon hearing the history of the Castle that they actually forgot to reprove her temerity.

"There are the remains of the old Castle," he replied, smiling at her kindly, for he thought she had been sufficiently punished.

"We don't live in it."

"Oh, don't you?" exclaimed the child, with an air of disappointment.

"No, we couldn't exactly," he laughed.

"Originally there were two courts lying north and south, surrounded by a high wall, outside which was a moat. The outer court was the south one, and there were entrances east and west. In front of the embattled gateway, which guarded the former, a drawbridge was thrown across the moat. In the outer court were the guard-room, stables, storehouses, and offices. An inner gate-house led to the north court, which was flanked by four round towers some seventy feet in height, and with walls eight feet thick, which were divided into three stories, the apartments only lighted by embrasures and very narrow windows. Portions only of these towers remain standing, and the shell of the outer gateway. The dwelling-house with its great hall and state apartments was in the inner court, but not a vestige of them remains."

"Then nothing remains intact?" queried Letty, whose large, clear eyes were full of the most sympathetic and flattering interest.

"The chapel is in a fair state of preserva-

tion, and contains some curious monuments to my ancestors, and a heap of armour they wore in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries."

"I should like to see it," cried Betty.

"So should I," said Saidee, while Letty secretly resolved to leave no stone unturned until she had made her way into this old relic of past ages.

"Perhaps you shall see it some day if you are a good girl," he told the child. "It consists of a nave and chantry chapel, and has only one door at the west end. The roof is of oak, and has the arms of our family—a drawn sword in a mailed hand carved on it—which is repeated in the stained glass of the windows, and again on the quaint old chairs."

"And where do you live now?" queried the enfant terrible. "Not in the chapel, I suppose?"

"Not exactly. Fairlea is a quarter of a mile from the Castle."

"And is it old too?"

"Not in comparison. It was only built in the time of the Commonwealth."

"And when was the Castle built?" asked Letty.

"That is rather a difficult question to answer, Miss Oliver."

"Why?"

"Because there was some kind of building there as early as the second century. Part of a Roman bath was found some time ago, some Roman coins and curious pottery; while in the time of the last English kings the name of the owner was Ethelwend. In the Domesday Survey the place belonged to Sir Guillaume de Montfort, an adherent of the Conqueror's. It had various other owners; and about the middle of the fifteenth century came into the possession of a remote ancestor of mine, and we have held it with few interruptions ever since."

"What were the interruptions?" demanded Betty. "And if you once lost your house, how did you ever manage to get it back again?"

"We were Royalists," he explained. "The Castle was held as a military position for Charles I. On his fall it was sequestered by Cromwell, but at the Restoration it was restored to the Rodneys of that day. The Protector several times passed the night in the Castle; and amongst the relics still preserved in the chapel are a pair of military riding-boots of Commonwealth fashion, with antique wooden stirrups, and the five-pointed page spurs, all of which are said to have belonged to old Noll himself."

"Oh, how I should like to see Fairlea!" gasped Betty, ecstatically.

"And I," sighed the beauty.

"And I too," said Saidee. "It must be most interesting."

"Get the General to take a house at Freshdale," murmured Captain Rodney, as she rose from the pile of cushions; and he handed her a lovely, if outre, gold-embroidered scarf, which she had dropped as she rose. "It is only a mile from Fairlea, a delightful spot. You would be enchanted with it."

"I must speak to him about it," she said, smiling up into his eyes. "Perhaps he would not care to go there."

"He will 'care' if you do," responded the young man something more than admiration shining in his eyes.

"Ah, yes, 'if' and with a light laugh she tossed the gorgeous scarf across her shoulders, and, without consulting the wishes of her hostesses as an English bred girl might, she coolly walked into the house, followed by the admiring glances of Rupert Rodney and the half envious ones of her cousins.

CHAPTER IV.

As the long hot summer days wore away the Olivers saw a great deal of their cousin and something of the General, but not very much. He haunted the Junior and the

United Service, and spent most of his time in clubland. Julia Oliver, always alert, kept a watchful eye on her brother, and after a while was fain to confess herself bewildered.

She could not for the life of her make out whether Gerard loved his only child or not. Baldie was certainly spoiled to the top of her bent. No request she made was ever refused, no matter how extravagant or wayward. Had she cried for the moon, the General would have got her the best imitation of it money could procure. The Arab she rode in Rotten Row was the admired of all beholders, her groom one of the stoutest to be seen there; her pair of cream-coloured ponies matched admirably; she had a box at the Opera; her jewels were magnificent, and her dress allowance was an income in itself.

The General had taken a suite of apartments in a fashionable hotel near Hyde Park, and he gave his daughter *carte blanche* for any entertainments she chose to give. He took her to Hurlingham, and allowed Cowper Rodney to do so to the Oaks and to Ascot. He belonged to the Lyric to please her, and became a member at Lord's. He kept a launch on the river, and hired a gaily-decorated motor-boat for the Henley week. He gave her every opportunity of seeing fashionable life, and under the most favourable circumstances; and yet, and yet—Mrs. Oliver had seen her brother in dignified moments regarding his lovely daughter with a sort of fastidious stare, and a peculiar look on his face which was one almost of horror; while if she addressed him suddenly, or laid her hand on his arm, he would start as though stung by a serpent, and get out of her way as quickly as possible, while, though he never denied her anything, and was lavish and generous in his allowance to her, he never offered to "cater" her, and seldom made her a present except at Christmas.

Of her birthday Mrs. Oliver discovered he never took the slightest notice, and there were apparently none of those little confidences between them which usually exist between father and daughter. He never asked her to do anything for him. Was a bawson wanting on his glove it was not Baldie whom he asked to sew it on, but his chaprassie, a bronze-coloured, picturesque, and highly useful person whom he had brought with him from the East. He by no means encouraged her to pay him those little attentions which most men like from most daughters; and if he could, without its being plainly and unpleasantly apparent, get out of scolding her anywhere, he did so, giving Cowper Rodney the pleasure, and to his old ohm it was a pleasure of cavallering the lovely Baldie to fête and flower-show, reception and dance.

Mrs. Oliver often wondered if her niece noticed how different her father was in his relations with her from what other girls' fathers were with them. If so, she never gave any outward sign of it, or showed that she was annoyed at it; but then the Honourable Julia soon discovered that Baldie was different from the ordinary run of girls.

She was not in the least conventional, quite au contraire; she was daintily unconventional and cared not a fig for the opinion of the world in general. One hot morning she appeared in the Row in a white linen habit, laced with *cord à la militaire* across the chest, just as women in India appear, but which are seldom or never seen in England, and at fêtes and garden parties she would wear curious mail gowns, or gorgeous frocks made of gold-threaded Eastern tissues, and her dusky locks surmounted by a little quaint golden cap, such as the Parsoes always wear, and load her wrists with extraordinary bangles and bracelets of elephants' hair, and adorn her beautiful person with a variety of odd and costly Eastern jewellery. At dances if she had a favourite partner she would waltz with him six times running if she chose; and she had a way of obliging to men's arms, and looking up into their faces with those luring eyes of hers, that scandalised Mrs. Oliver immensely, and which

made her, at the risk of offending her wealthy niece, expostulate with and admonish her.

All in vain. Baldie would laugh that rich musical laugh which made her hearers think of the East, of harems, and lovely half-veiled women, the rhythmic plash of scented toulals, and the thrilling song of the bulbul; and then, under her aunt's nose, would order Conrad, her blood arab, to be saddled, and go for a mad gallop down the Row, or anywhere else her wild fancy led her.

When the General was appealed to about his daughter's vagaries and extraordinary freaks he would simply shrug his shoulders and say she must do as she pleased; he would not interfere. But once when Mrs. Oliver emboldened to speak openly by his indifference, and smiling under some sneering remarks made by a parcel of kind friends about her young relative's wild proceedings, ventured to suggest that her actions were certainly not conventional and hardly proper, and that she might be supposed to be something very undesirable, the General flamed out upon her with such a gust of terrible anger, that in a few withering words he silenced her for ever on the score of Baldie's improprieties.

Mrs. Oliver was a brave woman, and not in the habit of flinching before unpleasant things, yet she never again so much as ventured to hint that she did not consider her niece the pink of everything that was proper.

After that one outbreak of wrath the General made no allusion either by word or manner to the affair, treating his sister just as usual; and she, knowing how much there was at stake, became meek and submissive to the midnight rides and the sultry dances.

She had ten daughters, and each daughter not uncharitably had a birthday, and on each birthday Baldie, with her usual reckless generosity, presented her cousins with a valuable present. Sometimes a silk dress, or a dainty mantle, sometimes a piece of jewellery, and sometimes a purse containing a five-pound note. Always something which was most acceptable to the family of gentle paupers.

Then she drove one or other of them nearly every day in her pony phaeton in The Lady's Mile; and though the turnout and the fair driver were followed by many curious and inquiring glances, and though at times she urged the ponies along at such a furious pace that she was stopped by the police, and afterwards summoned for furious driving, still they would not have given up those drives on any account, for it was their only chance of appearing in the Park in a carriage. She was always ready to take one of them with her to Hurlingham, or the Lyric, to the Opera, up the river, or to any place they wished. If eccentric, she was nevertheless the soul of generosity, and never indulged in any such petty meanness as jealousy.

Letty was a good-tempered girl, and amiable enough as a rule. Still she often marvelled at Baldie's broad-minded views of things in general, the utter absence of jealousy she displayed. Had she a pretty gown and Letty admired it, it was given to her at once; had she tickets for any particular place, and Robert Rodney was known to be going there, she would at once ask her cousin to come, an act of generosity the other hardly felt herself capable of under existing circumstances; while, if Letty looked handsomer than usual, Baldie would say, "You look lovely to-day, Letty; that blue gown suits you much better than the pink one," or some remark of that sort, which showed how utterly free from "envy, hatred and malice" she was, and made the English girl feel that she was her superior.

"She is an untutored little savage, and will end by disgracing us," exclaimed Mrs. Oliver angrily, towards the end of the season, after some escapade rather more wild and startling than usual.

"She is worth the whole of us put together, with our miserable shams and paltry subtleties and hollow display," said Letty angrily, who, of all the Miss Olivers, was the only one,

except perhaps Betty, that dared to reply to the Honourable Julia.

"What a paragon of hers you are!" sneered Maria. "She must make it worth your while to defend her outrageous conduct."

"She does," replied the beauty with the utmost coolness. "I happened to say to-day that I envied her immensely going to Scotland, and at once she asked me to go with them; and as uncle Gerard pressed me to go too, of course I accepted the invitation."

"Extraordinary how he hovers to be alone with her," murmured Mrs. Oliver.

"What, mother," ejaculated Letty, somewhat sharply, "don't you want me to go? I won't much matter what pranks she plays amongst the trossachs. She won't be much noticed there as in town; and as to frocks, I will manage with one tailor-made gown in addition to those I have; if you can get it for me."

"Of course, of course, my dear," assented her mother, quickly. "You must certainly go; especially as your uncle wished it too. I must manage somehow about the frock, though we are totally pressed for money just now. Still, such an opportunity cannot be lost. Baldie is certainly very kind in asking you to go about with her," she added, mollified by the prospect of having one of the ten taken off her hands for several weeks.

"She has a heart of gold," sighed Letty, who was beginning to really care for her wayward little cousin.

A week later the Byrneys and Letty went up to Scotland, and remained there until towards the end of October, when the cold amongst the mountains above them soured, and the former took up their abode once more at the Silver Crescent Hotel.

CHAPTER V.

OCTOBER merged into November, and November brought with it the usual delightful accompaniment of fog, things to which Baldie, bred and born in the East, and used to the heat of the tropics, could not bear.

"Father," she exclaimed, petulantly, one day as she rose from the luncheon-table, and after looking out of the window at the thick wall of pea-soup mist, turned, with a pout of disgust on her lovely lips, to him, "I can't live in this deadly atmosphere. If we stay here much longer I shall die."

"Do you feel ill?" he inquired, regarding her closely.

"Hardly ill," she replied; "but choked, oppressed, I don't seem able to breathe. I want the sun; I can't live without it. Is it foggy everywhere in England?"

"No," exclaimed Captain Rodney, who was luncheon with them, quickly. "It was bright and sunny yesterday at Falmouth. Quite warm in the sun, and clear as in summer."

"How delightful!" she exclaimed, throwing herself on her knees beside him, and resting her hands lightly on his knee, an action which, though innocent in itself, coinciding that she had known the young man since she was a little girl of seven, was yet one that made her father wince and frown. "How I should like to go there!"

"Would you really?" said the young man, looking down at her.

"Yes, indeed I should, anywhere to be out of this horrid darkness," and she bent forward and rested her chin on her clasped hands.

"Then why don't you come? My mother is at Falmouth now, and will be more than delighted if you will come and stay with her; and let if you like that part of the country. And you, too, General," turning to the elder man. "I can promise you some good hunting."

The General muttered something about its being "very kind."

"Shall we go, father?" queried Baldie, coolly, turning her lovely eyes on him questioningly.

"It might be inconvenient to Lady Rodney to receive us now," said Sydney, with some constraint.

"I assure you it won't be," her son declared, quickly. "My mother will be only too delighted to have you with her. My uncle Cowper is there now, and the governor means to spend nearly the whole winter at Faltha, as it is so much warmer than in London. You had much better come down, General," he added, persuasively. "You were speaking the other day of taking a country house. Now there is a charming one at Freshdale, just a mile from our place, that would suit you, I am sure."

"I don't care for old houses," growled the General, who loved the sweet shady side of Pall-mall and his clubs, and was not nearly so anxious to leave London as his daughter. "Rat and beetle traps, cold draughts, and inconvenient, no modern improvements, no sanitary arrangements, dark corners, too many doors, too many passages. Won't suit me at all—used to India and a cosy bungalow."

"Trowbridge Hall is the most modern of buildings," laughed Rupert.

"Oh!" grunted Sydney.

"It was built by Sir Joshua Jones, a rich city magnate, is on the most approved sanitary plan, with every modern improvement. Electric light, an elevator, corridors all heated with hot-water pipes, spacious rooms, a Turkish bath attached, beautiful grounds, &c."

"You ought to have been a house agent's clerk, Rupert," laughed Sydney, "you have mistaken your vocation."

"I really believe I have," agreed Rupert. "I couldn't stand the trouble of furnishing a large place of that sort."

"No need to. It is to be let furnished. Sir Joshua's wife died there six months ago, and he took a dislike to the place, and left it at once, giving orders that it was to be let just as it was."

"And no one has taken it?"

"No, not at present. It is a large place, and of course, the rental is heavy, so a tenant has not yet appeared. Come down General, and see it. I am sure you will like Trowbridge Hall."

"Yes, and I am sure I shall too."

And so, though the General grumbled, and protested, and growled, some ten days later, when an invitation of rather a pressing description came from Lady Rodney, he found himself obliged to accept it, and left London for Somersetshire with Saldee.

She was delighted with Faltha, delighted with the Castle, with the chapel, with the armour, with everything which appertained to the Rodneys, and was never tired of listening to Rupert's stories of his long-bygone ancestors, of the Crusaders, of Lancastrians, of the nobles who had fought in Tudor times, of the cavaliers who had nobly supported the Charleses, and of gallants of later times who had distinguished themselves in love and war.

Then the soft balmy climate suited the little Anglo-Indian admirably, and she revelled in the beauty of the scenery; so the end of it all was, to satisfy his wayward child, the General took Trowbridge Hall, and set up his household gods within its spacious rooms.

The Hall was charmingly situated on the side of a hill, in fact, nestled amid the Wiltshire hills, while close at hand and in the distance were glimpses of the loftier Somersetshire downs; for it happened that the house was built on a tongue of land in the county of Wiltshire, which ran into Somersetshire, and the boundary was rather difficult to define, that is, difficult to the stranger—the natives knew to an inch where the boundary line ran.

The river Avon wound in and out amid the emerald-green meadows, flashing in the sun-rays like a curved steel ribbon, and on the farther side rose a steep lofty bank, clothed thickly with larch firs and Norwegian pines. Instead of hedges, the fields were enclosed by loose stone walls covered with lovely bright

green moss, which seemed to bind and keep them together.

It was early in January when they settled there and already tiny yellow primroses were showing their pale blossoms in sheltered nooks, already the thrushes were whistling in the trees, dissolved into the belief, by the balmy warmth, that spring was at hand; and now and again a lark on a brilliant morning would soar aloft, and burst out into a flood of melody; the short note of the chiffchaff was heard, and sometimes the twitter of the wren and the coo of the wood-pigeon.

Saldee very soon made herself acquainted with the numerous birds common to the district, and had a small regiment of feathered visitors every morning who came to peck at the dainty crumbs scattered on the sill of her own particular room, and peep at the foreign feathered pejs which were in a gilded cage in that room.

Rupert, whose regiment was quartered at C—, within an hour's ride by train of Freshdale, spent every moment he could at the Hall, somewhat to the disgust of Lady Rodney, who hardly looked upon Saldee as exactly the sort of girl to make her son a good wife. She was too un-English to suit that fastidious and highly bred dame's taste. The General, too, hardly regarded the intimacy existing between the two young people with favour, but from a widely different cause.

It occurred to him that a counter-attraction might prove beneficial, so he suggested that Saldee should ask one of her cousins down to stay with her.

"The pretty one," he suggested, rather vaguely, for there were so many nieces he was slightly confused over their separate identity.

"I should like to have Letty and Betty down," she cried, clapping her hands with childish glee.

"Very well," agreed her father, resignedly.

So to the great joy of the Lotus Street family an invitation came; and in due time, when all the best bibe and tapers were furnished up and packed, Letty and Betty arrived at the Hall, the latter a trifle awed and her natural impudence subdued by the magnificence and evidence of wealth that met her eyes on every side. Letty, on the other hand, assumed an air of nonchalant indifference and affected to take everything as a matter of course.

"Are you not glad to see me once more?" she queried of Rupert, who had come in as usual to have his cup of afternoon tea at the Hall, with a languishing glance at him.

"Of course I am delighted," he responded readily, for he liked the good-tempered blonde, who had always shown herself an ally and friend of Saldee's.

"I thought you would be," she went on, with a smile that displayed her beautiful teeth, still keeping her eyes fixed on him.

"And you thought rightly," he replied, in a light jesting way. "I have been counting the hours since I heard you were coming."

"Flatterer," she sighed.

"I never flatter you," he responded.

"They say people never flatter those they love," she said audaciously.

"Then I must adore you," he laughed.

As he uttered these words Saldee looked at them, and something in her cousin's attitude and look roused the demon-jalousie within her breast.

It had never struck her before that Rupert Rodney would—might—love beautiful brilliant Letty; and the thought that he might, nay perhaps did, came upon her with crushing force.

She felt that she might love him, this man whom half unconsciously she had loved since childhood—felt it as only an intense Eastern nature can feel.

Her face became pale even to the lips, and she sank into a chair. In a moment he was at her side, all anxiety to know if she were ill? But she turned from him rather coldly, declaring it was only a spasm of pain; and then

when she recovered her self-possession she became wildly gay, and remained so throughout the remainder of that afternoon and evening.

The next morning when Rodney strolled over and proposed a game of badminton she left him alone in the inner hall with Letty, and exposed herself on the plea of household affairs. She was far too proud to force her society on a man whom she believed loved another woman.

This went on for a week or ten days. She carefully avoided being alone even for the space of a moment with the young man; she was cool and reserved, and continued to throw him and Letty much together. He was bewildered and annoyed, but was given no opportunity of demanding an explanation.

Saldee, somewhat to the General's dismay, spent a good deal of her time in his society, and Rupert was baffled; until one day when he had come out with his gun, bent upon slaughtering anything that came within reason of it, he saw Saldee sitting on the fallen trunk of a tree, her head drooped forward on to her bosom, her hands clasped loosely on her knees, her whole aspect and attitude bespeaking deep dejection.

A few strides brought him to her side, and as she sprang up, he dropped his gun and caught her in his arms, holding her straight before him, so that he could easily look down into her pale, troubled face.

"Saldee," he said, almost sternly, as he thought of the dreariness of the last ten days, and how little he had seen of her, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Of what?" she demanded, defiantly, while a scarlet glow leapt to her pale cheeks.

"Of your conduct towards me?"

"Of my conduct towards you?" she echoed, scornfully. "Is it not rather I who should ask the meaning of your conduct towards me?"

"Why have you avoided me, Saldee?" he asked, his sleep involuntarily lightening as her arms, as though he was afraid she might again escape him.

"Need you ask?"

"Certainly I need. What have I done to offend you?"

"You have not offended me," she answered, coldly; but—but—and then her icy reserve melted, and in a flood of passionate language she reproached him for loving Letty.

"My dear child, of what are you speaking?" he asked, in amazement.

"Of your love for Letty," she replied almost sullenly.

"But—I do not love Letty."

"I myself heard you say you did."

"My darling, I did but jest. There is but one woman in all the world I love, and she is here in my arms," and he stooped and kissed her now softly crimsoned cheek.

"Don't dare to do that again," she said, trying to speak haughtily, which was rather a difficult matter, she was so tightly clasped; and immediately the young man felt a wild desire to repeat the offence.

"Are you still angry with me?" he queried, resting his cheek on her brow, while she angrily and ineffectually tried to free herself from his close embraces.

"I shall never forgive you," she murmured, almost inaudibly by reason of her mouth being crushed up against his chest.

"Oh, you must, you will! Don't be cruel, dearest, to the man who loves you better than anyone else in the world," he pleaded, tenderly.

"Why should I?" she demanded, still stubbornly.

"Because I ask you to here, on my knees," and he knelt at her feet, holding both little hands in his. "Forgive me, love, my wife that is to be!" and as she met the pleading glance of those blue eyes she loved so well, all her anger melted away, and bending down she imprinted a kiss of fond forgiveness on his forehead.

CHAPTER VI.

THE General's peace of mind was greatly disturbed that evening when, as usual, he repaired after dinner to his smoking-room snugger, and was followed by Captain Rodney, who, without much preamble, in a few straightforward, manly words, told him that he loved his daughter, and desired, with the General's permission, to make Saidee his wife as soon as matters could be arranged.

For fully five minutes there was a dead silence; then the General said huskily and unsteadily,—

"Your words surprise me, take me unawares!"

"Why?" inquired the young man in surprise.

"Saidee is still a child."

"Nearly eighteen, she tells me."

"She seems to me still a child," Sydney went on nervously, his white lips twitching, his eyes glued to the floor. "I never—gave a thought—Heaven forgive—so her being loved or married yet."

"I know it is a great deal to ask," broke out Rupert, quickly, "for your only child. But I will leave the army and settle down at the Dower House near here, and, on my honour, I love her so well that you need not fear for her future. Her happiness will be mine. Only say you think me worthy of her?"

"I think you quite worthy of her, Rupert," replied the general kindly but very gravely. "I could trust her future in your hands. It is not that—it is not that."

For a while Rodney stood puzzled and silent, then an idea occurred to him.

"Will you think the matter over and let me know your decision in a few days?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Sydney quickly, grasping at this idea as a drowning man might at a straw. "Leave me now. You shall have my decision in a few days." And then, as the younger man left the room, the elder bent forward, and, burying his face in his hands, remained thus till the grey light of dawn stole in through the shutterless windows, and warned him that another day was at hand.

With a groan he rose to his feet, and extinguishing the lamp, he went up to his bedroom, where he made a careful toilet and breakfasted before descending once more to his snugger, where he gave orders that no one was to disturb him until Major Rodney came; for soon after eight o'clock his eyes had ridden off on one of the fleetest arabs to Fairies, with a message from Sydney to his old chum, and the day was yet young when Cowper Rodney entered the General's snugger.

"What is it? Are you ill?" exclaimed the Major, as he caught sight of the other's pale face.

"No," replied Sydney, quietly. "Not ill physically, as you mean. Ill mentally, perhaps. I have asked you to come here," he went on after a pause, with evident effort, "because there is something I must tell you, that in truth I ought to have told long ago. Only shame has kept me silent."

"Shame, Gerald!" exclaimed his friend warmly, "and in connection with you! Why, if anyone else had said such a thing, I should have knocked him down. You are an honourable upright soldier!"

"And yet I am not what I have seemed to be," muttered the old man sadly. "There is a blot on my escutcheon, a shameful one."

"General!" exclaimed Major Rodney, in dismay.

"Yes, Cowper, I sinned and I have sinned horribly for it, and now I must drag down the veil which has hidden the past, and disclose it in all its bare hideousness. You know, I suppose," he went on, "that Rupert proposed for Saidee yesterday?"

"Yes; he told us, but that you had not yet sanctioned the engagement, though my brother and Lady Rodney will welcome your child as their daughter most warmly."

"Wait," said the General, "wait until you

have heard my story. They are both proud, they may refuse to receive her as their daughter when they know all."

"Impossible."

"When I was up in the Hills some twenty years ago, recovering from the effect of a wound, I met a Mrs. Sherlock. She was a native lady, the only child of an Indian prince, but she had married an Englishman, a John Sherlock, an immensely wealthy indigo-planter, for what reason I could never discover, unless it was for his wealth, which was almost fabulous. Certainly she did not love him, and they had no family, so there was no tie to keep them true to each other. He and I became fast friends—a friendship which was fostered sedulously by Aranee. At first I did not know why, for I am not a vain man, but at last I knew she had conceived a most unhappy passion for me. She was a lovely woman. Tall, lithic, graceful, with dark passionate eyes that bewildered a man's senses, and caressing ways that won upon my feelings by slow yet insidious degrees.

Heaven knows I fought desperately against the unholy love. Again and again I fled from her devilish fascinations, and again and again she managed to cross my path. I am not a villain, Cowper," went on the General, brokenly. "I never wronged a man before or since, but at last her wicked influence conquered me. I fell, and dishonoured myself and my friend."

The General ceased for a moment and silence reigned within the room, broken only by the loud ticking of the clock; then he began again.

"Before my child was born Sherlock died, and on my knees I begged and implored Aranee to marry me, to let me make what reparation I could. She laughed at my frantic prayers. We were lovers, she said, and lovers we would always remain. Marriage would spoil everything. I remained with her until she became a mother, and then I left her. She could not really have cared for me," added the soldier bitterly, "or she would have become my wife rather than let me go. Five years later she died of fever, and Saidee was sent down to me, and though the child has ever been a thorn in the flesh, a stinging reminder of my base sin, yet I have striven to do my duty by her."

"And you have succeeded nobly," exclaimed the Major, wringing his hand.

"You will understand, now, Cowper, why I would not give my consent to the engagement last night. There is the bar sinister in Saidee Sydney's shield, and Roger and Lady Rodney will probably object to the alliance."

"I don't think she will; and as for Rupert, he loves Saidee far too well to care."

"Then you will tell them?" implored the General.

"Yes," assented the Major, and before a couple of hours had elapsed Sir Roger, Lady Rodney and Rupert knew the girl was illegitimate. Her ladyship indignantly vowed that she would never, never receive her as her daughter. The Baronet, in his usual breezy fashion, declared that he couldn't see that it mattered much, while Rupert vowed he would marry her and no one else, even were she a gutter wench, a speech which roused his mother's wrath to boiling point, and to avoid her angry words he mounted his horse and rode towards the Hall, determined to see the General first and beg again for his consent to their marriage, and afterwards to seek his beloved Saidee.

As he rode slowly along the upper road he heard the ring of a horse's hoofs as it galloped furiously along the lower one, and in less than a minute he saw a powerful grey horse thundering along, with a female figure clinging to its mane.

He rode quickly down the hill track, hoping to be in time to check its wild career; and as he went he saw another rider, on a small black horse, galloping across a field, evidently with the intention of cutting across the grey

and stopping it. Instantly he recognised horse and rider; it was Saidee on her arab.

"Heaven! she will be killed!" he cried, frantically, knowing the slender arab could never withstand the shock of an encounter with the huge grey carriage horse, which Betty, in a mad moment, had mounted, and which had bolted with her.

Using whip and spur, he urged his horse along, but, despite his speed, the tragedy was enacted before his eyes.

The Arab crossed the field, cleared the loose stone wall like a bird, with a clever kick-back, and Saidee put him across the road.

In the flash of an eye the mad, runaway brute was on them. Both horses reared up, and then fell, a struggling, kicking heap in the roadway.

In a moment the grey was up, and, trampling in a sickening fashion over the prostrate forms, tore away on its wild career.

The instant Rupert's horse reached the lower road he was out of the saddle, and drew Saidee from under the arab, who was struggling to rise with a broken leg.

Tenderly he pillowed the heavy head on his breast, calling upon her frantically by every endearing name to look at him, and just once the white lids lifted slowly and wearily, and the glorious dark eyes gazed back love unutterable into his. Then, with a faint sigh breaking from her pale lips, she shut them upon this world for ever; and Betty, the cause of all this mischief, lay white and cold in the middle of the roadway with her neck broken.

His daughter's death was a heavy blow to the General. She was the last link which bound him to the past; and though in a way she had been a pain and a reproach to him, still after she was gone he realised how dear Aranee's child had been to him.

He gave up the Hall and went back to Clubland, more morose, more cynical than ever.

Rupert Rodney was never the same after that spring day on which was enacted the tragedy of his life.

He showed no inclination to marry; but some six years later, when urged by his mother to do so, he married Letty Oliver, because she knew, and would not expect that devotion from him which a stranger might; and besides, she had known and loved the dead girl.

Letty made him a good wife, and bore him fair children; and after a while he forgot, in a measure, in the calm, peaceful flow of his married life, his fiery Eastern love.

Yet sometimes, on a bright spring morning, when the throbbles whistled jubilantly amid the pines and firs, or on a summer's night, when the nightingales sang in the copse behind the Castle, and the whole earth was lighted with the resplendent moonbeams, with an overwhelming rush would come the recollection of Saidee.

Once more he would feel her clinging arms as she clasped him passionately to her breast; once more he would see her glorious dark eyes uplifted to his, her warm breath on his cheek, and he would feel, know, that he would resign all his pleasant, calm, durable happiness, sacrifice everything, to just once more hold his lost darling to his breast, and press his lips to those quivering red ones which seemed so near his own!

[THE END]

SHEEP'S tails are cut off at a very early stage in their existence, because it was found that if the tail was allowed to grow it took too much nourishment away from the body of the sheep. The long-haired sheep of Asia Minor are supplied with little cars in which to carry their tails, as otherwise the continual dragging along the ground would naturally spoil the beautiful long hair so peculiar to the tails of most Persian animals.

A UNIQUE opera cloak, unlike anything seen before is to be exhibited at the World's Fair by an American gentleman. It is to be a circular fifty seven inches in length and composed of the very small and delicate feathers of prairie chickens. As only five or six feathers of this particular kind are found on a single bird, and as each feather is sewed on separately and so smoothly as to produce an even surface, it is not surprising to learn that ten years' patient labour and the plumage of hundreds of birds have been devoted to the lovely creation.

A PLACE for "visiting babies" at the World's Fair is under consideration, and a space is likely to be reserved near the woman's building, on which a house may be erected for this purpose. Nurses trained to care for children will be put in charge, the mothers will get the children checked, and with calm consciences enjoy the tour of the grounds unhindered. The conditions on which the site is reserved are that the Women's Board shall show that they can meet the expense of the building, and that it shall be maintained without expense to the exposition company.

At one time the number of swans in England must have been enormous. Paulus Jovius, writing three and a half centuries ago, declared that he never saw a river so thickly covered with swans as the Thames; and in 1625 when John Taylor, the water poet, rowed from London to Chertsey Church, and then up the Avon to Salisbury, he was amazed at the swarm of birds on that stream. "As I passed up the Avon," he tells us, "at least 2,000 swans, like so many pilots, swam in the deepest places before me, and showed me the way."

It is impossible to fill a glass completely with any liquid, from rim to centre. The most common fluids—such as water, milk or spirit—are attracted from the sides of the vessel into which they are placed so that they rise around the brim, leaving a hollow in the middle. Hence a cup filled to the point of overflow with any of these liquids is not absolutely full, though it appears to be so at the edge. Fluids, on the other hand, which do not adhere, or are not attracted upwards by the sides of the vessel, sink round the brim and rise in the centre. Thus mercury in a glass forms a convex surface, while water forms a concave.

ALTHOUGH the ant is a tiny creature, yet its brain is even tinier. But although it is necessarily smaller than the ant's head which contains it, yet it is larger in proportion, according to the ant's size, than the brain of any known creature. The best writers upon ants—those who have made the astonishing intelligence of these little insects a special study—are obliged to admit that they display reasoning ability, calculation, reflection and good judgment. Such qualities of brain show a more than ordinary instinct, and we are not surprised to hear that the ant's big brain carries out our idea that he possesses a higher intelligence than is shown by other workers of his size.

ELECTRICIANS are talking of wonderful things as possibilities of the near future. They assert confidently that before long houses, offices, and shops, buses, and railway carriages, will be heated as well as lighted by electricity. Not only that, but all cooking may be done by the same agency, and the heat, dust, grime, and smoke of the cooking-stove and the heating furnace will be the nightmares of memory. The coal cellar is to be abolished, and the heat to warm the house and prepare the meals is to be brought in on a wire and distributed to do any service at any time in response to the pressing of a button or the turning of a switch. It is asserted that the electric heater is so nearly developed on a thoroughly practical basis that it can be available at a slight increase in cost over present methods, an increase which the electricians say should be more than made up for in the superiority in cleanliness and convenience.

THE REPROACH.

—o—

HAS doubt compelled that heart of thine
To think me false to thee?
Believe, Jeanette, the pain is mine,
And thou art false to me.
How couldst thou think that I would wrong
Or be to thee untrue;
I, who have loved so deep and long,
And been so faithful too!

From childhood we have loved, Jeanette—
Since those bright days of yore,
When first as little ones we met,
Outside the school-house door.
I loved thee, too, when, as a boy,
I led thee by the hand,
And thought each smile of thine a joy—
Each wish a sweet command.

Do you forget how, at the fair,
When we last met, to part—
I placed a rosebud in your hair.
And clasped you to my heart?
"Dear maid," I cried, "for thee I live
And Death shall claim this breast
Before a thought of mine shall give
One pang to mar thy rest."

Believe, Jeanette, I'm still the same,
I love thee even now;
I still dwell fondly on thy name,
I still repeat the vow.
Then be to me the same again,
A maiden fond and dear;
For truth like mine should know no pain,
Nor love like mine a tear.

HILDRED ELSINORE.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Warringtons were not rich as most people count such things, but compared to the Rector of Little Netherton they were positively wealthy.

For one thing they had no children, and what might have been short commons for a large family proved ample for themselves.

Then, after years of struggles, when his heart grew sick with hope deferred, and briefs were so few that he had to depend mainly on his pen for subsistence, Richard Warrington chanced to be concerned in a *cause célèbre*.

His leader was absent when the critical moment came, and he had the sole responsibility of the defence. He got off the prisoner, and from that time forward prosperity seemed to smile on him.

It was not indifference which had made his wife fight so shy of her brother's family. She had never liked his second wife, and Charles himself was a wretched correspondent; but when he wrote to ask for a bed, because he was coming up to London on business, Mrs. Warrington's heart opened.

She was shocked at his worn, aged look; and when she sent that kind invitation to one of her elder nieces she meant it.

"You know, Dick," she told her husband when Mr. Elsinore was gone, "Charles is too poor to save a shilling for those girls, and they will never marry anyone worth having in Little Netherton."

The barrister smiled.

"Am I to understand No. 5, Daffodil-road is to be turned into a kind of private registry office for matrimonial candidates—is that your idea, Bessie?"

"No, it isn't," said Mrs. Warrington, decidedly. "All I want is just to give one of those girls a chance and see what she's fit for."

They knew a good many people in these

days; since that first success they had moved into a better house.

A few men who knew Mr. Warrington professionally had requested their wives to call in Daffodil-road, and they came away delighted with the bright, cheery little woman who shared the barrister's fortunes.

Before Bessie Warrington understood what was happening, she found herself with quite a large circle of acquaintances, with an "at home" day and a "set;" and though these things came rather as a surprise to her, on the whole she enjoyed them.

Of all places in the world London accommodates itself most readily to a varying income. In the country people know the veriest details of their neighbour's establishment, and every slight token of increased prosperity would be the theme of gossip; in London, folks are too busy to pay much attention to such things.

When the Warringtons moved to Daffodil-road they kept two servants and a boy. It was only a mile from their former residence, where a maid of all-work had completed their establishment; but no one guessed this, and the ladies who flocked to call on Mrs. Warrington supposed she had lived "too far out" for them to know her before—a mile makes a good deal of difference in the world of fashion, particularly if it is a mile on the wrong side.

Dick could not have told anyone his income, for he was not sure of it himself. They dined late, and if he brought home a friend there was never any difficulty. He could take his wife to any concert or theatre she desired to attend without feeling extravagant. She was always well dressed, and the house always looked well-cared for; but they never gave large parties or bought peaches at sixpence a piece.

He was well satisfied with his position, and thought Bessie a wonderful woman. He denied her nothing—not even her wish to introduce a niece to their cosy home, a country girl who would probably jar terribly on his somewhat æsthetic taste, and who would feel terribly out of her element in Daffodil-road.

He had never seen Mrs. Elsinore, so he imagined a feminine edition of the Rector dressed in frightfully cheerful colours, and with a general want of fashion about her; but he was a good husband and a really kind man, so the only protest he raised was that his wife should put some definite limits to her invitation.

"Say three months," he suggested, cheerfully. "In the summer a visitor isn't so much on one's hands, and in the long vacation we shall be out of town; but, Bessie, a third party, who might not prove congenial, would be an awful nuisance in winter, shut up in a little house like this."

"It's not such a very little house, Dick."

"My dear girl, it's plenty big enough for us," he said, smiling. "There, go and meet your niece, and I only hope you'll find her charming; but if she isn't, if by any chance she takes after her mother, girls do sometimes, Bessie, why, then you'll be grateful to me for fixing the limits of her visit."

As she went off to King's Cross Station, Mrs. Warrington decided her husband was quite right—a three months' visit was as long as any niece could expect to be invited for by an unknown aunt; and if Hildred did prove a very uncouth country girl, it would be a comfort to be spared the task of writing to say she could not keep her any longer—for thirteen weeks she could put up with anything!

She was glad Charles had sent his eldest daughter. Bessie had never met the first Mrs. Elsinore, but she knew that by birth she was far superior to her successor.

Besides, the next girl was christened Martha, and to the rather fastidious matron this name savoured rather of the kitchen. She would not have cared to introduce "my niece Martha" to her friends and acquaintances.

"She must be eighteen," thought the aunt,

as she journeyed on in the Metropolitan Railway, which on a hot summer day is not the pleasantest mode of conveyance. "Well, I do hope she is not very awkward; it will be such a trial to Dick. I am glad she chose this train, because there will be time for her to get rested and change her dress before he sees her."

The train was late, and when at last it came slowly into the terminus Mrs. Warrington had had time to get into that state popularly known as "the fidgets."

She had promised to keep this girl three months. What if she proved hopelessly awkward and unrepresentable?

The lady had known enough of poverty herself to guess what a squeeze it must be to bring up a family of nine on two hundred a year; and Hildred was the eldest. What if she had been made a little household drudge, and her hands bore marks of homely toil?

But Mrs. Warrington was very tender-hearted, and she banished these fears by a determined effort.

"Whatever Hildred looks like, she is poor Charles's daughter, and I don't suppose she has had too much pleasure in her life. Three months won't be long to bear a little inconvenience, and whatever she is I have made up my mind she shall have a taste of happiness, poor little thing!"

In came the train. Mrs. Warrington moved slowly down the platform to the point where the third-class carriages would deposit their freight.

Then as one after another of the weary travellers alighted, dirty, travel-stained, and tired, she gave an anxious look at more than one youthful face, thinking it might be Hildred's; but she saw one after another of the arrivals greeted by expectant friends, and at last she began to fear there was some mistake, and little Miss Elsinore had not arrived. A question to one of the porters elicited a helpful suggestion.

"Go round to where the luggage is, ma'am. If the young lady's come she's sure to go there to look after her box."

There was not much luggage by that train, nor else most of it had been claimed. Mrs. Warrington's quick eyes soon spied out a commodious wooden trunk with a label addressed,—

"Miss Elsinore,
Passenger to London,"

and by that humble box she took up her station, resolving to make another search for her niece when the platform was a little clearer.

But she was spared the need. She heard a sweet, girlish voice close beside her, saying,—
"I have only one box. It is painted yellow, and has the name Elsinore on a label."

Mrs. Warrington looked towards where the words came from, and saw a young girl plainly dressed in black, with a face that seemed to bring she tears into her own eyes as she looked at it, it was so sweet and sad.

In all her fancy pictures of her niece it had never occurred to her she might be beautiful; but for this girl "beautiful" was the only right description.

She was thin and worn from illness, her attire was as poor as the aunt had expected; but in looking at her one forgot everything except her face.

Mrs. Warrington thought she had never seen such a lovely picture as was made by the dark, silky hair, the clear, colorless skin, and the wonderful star-like blue eyes.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, my dear," she cried, putting out her hand, "for I am sure that you are Hildred."

A sweet smile lit up the face, but only showed more clearly how sad and delicate it was.

"Yes, I am Hildred," she answered, frankly. "How very good of you to come to meet me."

Another glance at the face, and Mrs. Warrington resolved to be extravagant and have a

cab all the way to Daffodil-road. The girl looked ready to drop now; what would she be like after the half hour or more the underground railway took to convey its customers from King's Cross to Waltham Green?

So a cab was hailed, and in a very few minutes the two ladies drove off, the common wooden box on the roof, and Mrs. Warrington devoutly hoping none of her fashionable acquaintances would be passing No. 5, Daffodil-road when it was carried into the house.

"No one can talk in cabs," she told Hildred with a smile, "and I don't mean even to try, so you had better lean back and try to rest. I am sure you must be tired."

The girl's lip trembled as though she were ready to cry. Clearly she could have had very little kindness meted out to her in her young life if such a small amount of consideration brought the tears to her eyes.

Daffodil-road at last, and No. 5. Marshall, the neat parlour-maid, opened the door promptly. It was by this time past five o'clock.

"Tea in the drawing-room at once, Marshall," said her mistress; "and I am not at home if anyone calls."

The aunt's drawing room was utterly unlike any of the farmhouse parlours Hildred had visited at home.

The farmers' wives had prided themselves on their substantial furniture, which always seemed to smell of beeswax and turpentine. Everything was solid and useful; but here, in West Kensington, it was Fetham really, but its inhabitants preferred the former name, solidity and use had been sacrificed to more perishable qualities.

When she moved Mrs. Warrington had "gone in for art." Probably her drawing-room had not cost half the sum paid by Mrs. Gibson's forebears for the plenishing of the best parlour.

The barrister's wife had excellent taste, and her room was charming. It would not "last." In ten years time, say, everything would want renewing; but then by that time she would be weary of it herself and want a change.

It was by no means large, though the most spacious apartment in the house. The bow window had blinds of old chintz, and long curtains of soft Eastern muslin. The carpet was good and thick, one's feet seemed to sink in as one moved along.

There was a piano, but its back had been fitted with shelves and formed a suitable repository of old china, so that Hildred hardly recognised her old friend. There was a deliciously inviting sofa, looking quite a nest of pillows. There were chairs of every shape and size, tiny tables supported Eastern flower-pots. Milking stools, draped in muslin, held tall and thin-looking ferns, the grate was filled with flowers, the pots which held them well concealed by moss, so that the effect was that of a green bank with lilies growing on it.

Hildred looked round, and her heart failed her. She must surely be the one blot in this beautiful picture. But Mrs. Warrington did not think so.

Marshall brought in tea, and when she had supplied her guest, the lady of the house said kindly,—

"You cannot think how glad I am to have you, Hildred. For years my one wish was a daughter; and while you are here I shall be able to imagine what my life would have been if that wish had been granted."

It was so good of you to have me," said Hildred, with something like a sob. "Do you know, Aunt Bessie, I had nearly made up my mind to come to London, and go to some Home for Working Girls till I could find something to do?"

"Are things so bad at home?"
"They are no worse," said Dreda, cheerfully; "but the children are growing up, and I am the eldest, so I thought I ought to do something. Mother could not spare Martha, she is so useful."

Mrs. Warrington felt more thankful than ever that she had been spared Martha; but she only asked, "Aren't you useful, Hildred?"

"Mother says I am good for nothing except to teach the children, for I am too fond of books to make a good housekeeper."

"And your father?"

"Rapa is so good. He always makes excuses for me," replied Hildred. "He said once we couldn't all be made alike, and that Martha and I were born different."

They lingered over tea, a fast growing intimate. It came as a shock to Mrs. Warrington when a telegram was brought her from her husband—

"Am bringing Captain Trefusis home to dinner!"

Was ever man so provoking? Mrs. Warrington knew Captain Trefusis slightly, and liked him very much. She could never forget that his father was the lawyer who saved her husband the brief which made his name.

On any other day she would have been rejoiced to welcome Captain Trefusis; but now, with Hildred barely an hour in the house, it did seem hard that the poor child's shyness and little deficiencies should be exhibited to a young man of fashion. Why, very likely, the girl had not an evening gown belonging to her.

"Are you very tired, dear?" she suggested, hoping to find a way out of her difficulty. "Would you rather not come down to dinner?"

But Hildred, in her fear of giving extra trouble, declared she was quite rested now and would prefer coming downstairs.

Mrs. Warrington herself took her to her room. The shabby wooden box had been uncoiled by Marshall, and stood in the centre of the floor, looking out of place with the pretty artistic furniture.

"Don't tire yourself with much unpacking," said Mrs. Warrington kindly; "but if you have a thinner dress you will find it cooler than that heavy serge," and she flattered herself she had managed the question without hurting the girl's feelings.

"My best dress is blotted still," said Hildred. "Mother chose it to last the winter; but I have some summer washing dresses, and I thought I would put on one of those."

Mrs. Warrington was too kind to let her contrivance appear. Visions of her niece coming down to dinner in a lilac print troubled her; but after all—she reasoned—young men did not know calico from silk, and as for Marshall, that invaluable servant knew her place, and—oh, rare quality!—never guessed.

"We dine at half-past seven," said Mrs. Warrington. "I will come in for you on my way downstairs."

Willingly would she have attired the child from her own wardrobe, but her dresses were all of a pronouncedly middle-aged stamp, and would not have suited a young girl; besides, not for worlds would she have hurt Hildred's feelings.

She was some time before she rejoined Hildred. The invaluable Marshall had to receive a few hints. One or two of the plants in the drawing-room were removed to grace the dinner-table.

Then the lady of the house attired herself in a black lace gown of quiet elegance, fastened some yellow roses at her waist, and with real anxiety as to the "washing frock," went in search of her niece.

"My dear child,"

She told her husband afterwards she could not help it. The words were literally wrung from her at sight of the transformation she witnessed.

It seemed to her she had left a bigger maid and discovered a Princess. The dress might be "an old washing one," but it had been an embroidered Indian muslin at the beginning of its career, and in spite of repeated journeys to the wash tub it had retained the soft flowy look peculiar to that fabric. It was made with

a full gathered bodice, and a plain skirt drawn into the waist by a band of black velvet.

Mrs. Elsinore had once possessed a brother in India. He was dead now, but in years gone by he had sent home many a case of presents for her and the children.

Martha objected to white. She said it did not suit her. The mother did not care for the extra washing entailed by using it for the children's frocks, and so the whole of the maiden had lain by till, as Hildred grew up, and clothes became increasingly hard to come by, she had been allowed to appropriate it.

Only a washed-out white gown without a scrap of colour, and yet how beautiful the girl looked!

Mrs. Warrington felt a load taken off her mind. She fastened some soft, pink flowers in the folds of lace at Hildred's throat, and said, quietly—

"White suits you, dear; you ought always to wear it," and with that she led the way downstairs.

The barister and his guest joined them in a few minutes.

Hildred felt quite at ease when she had received her uncle's kindly greeting. She seemed to know by instinct that Richard Warrington's word was his bond, and that if he bade her welcome, he meant just what he said.

Of the guest she thought nothing; there was so much strange and new to her in Defford-road that she hardly noticed Captain Trefusis at all. It was only when the dessert was on the table that her attention was drawn by suddenly hearing him speak of Netheriton Castle.

"I have never been there myself," he was saying to Mrs. Warrington, "but my mother used to tell us long stories of the old place. She was the grandchild of one of the earls of Netheriton, and as her parents were in India, she lived at the Castle till she was old enough to join them."

"Oh, Captain Trefusis," said Hildred, quickly, "do you know the present earl?"

The young soldier shook his head.

"I fancy, Miss Elsinore, no one in England has really 'known' him, since the suggestive deaths of his wife and child made him a recluse. He spends most of his time in Germany. We have had no communication with him since my mother's death; she was his first cousin, and he kept up a slight correspondence with her."

Mrs. Warrington started.

"The Earl has no children; he himself was an only child. Surely, Captain Trefusis, you must be his heir."

Hugh smiled.

"My father says so," he returned, cheerfully; "but to tell you the truth, Mrs. Warrington, I never count on it. I have my profession, and I am the governor's eldest son, so I am not likely to want for bread and butter, since he has made a nice thing out of the law. I can't forget that men have married at seventy before now, and as Lord Netheriton is decidedly eccentric, it would be quite possible for him after twenty years of mourning for his wife, to choose a second partner. It's ill work waiting for dead men's shoes, and so I never dwell on my chance of being his heir."

Hildred found her voice.

"I am sure the Earl will never marry again," she said, gravely. "If you had only seen him, Captain Trefusis, you would know what I mean; he looks as though his heart were buried in his wife's grave."

"So you are," put in Mr. Warrington, "you will find yourself Earl of Netheriton yet."

"Not that; the title can only descend in the male line, and my claim would be through my mother."

"Any way, you will be Lord of Netheriton Castle."

The young officer smiled.

"I am in no hurry for my inheritance," he said, simply. "Miss Elsinore, if ever the

day comes I stand in my cousin's place, will you welcome me as a neighbour?"

She answered "Yes," gravely and deliberately, with never a thought that Hugh Trefusis was struck by her beauty.

She felt the difference it would make to them all to have the Castle open, and the scene of happy family life, of cheerful hospitality; but it never entered her head that when Hugh Trefusis ruled there he would want a wife. It entered her aunt's though.

"Dick," said Mrs. Warrington early the next day, while her husband was shaving, "we must have Captain Trefusis here a great deal. I am sure he was taken with Hildred."

Mr. Warrington put down his cigar and stared at her in amazement.

"He has only seen the child once."

"But he admired her, and—"

"My dear Bessie, it would be a base return for the kindness Mr. Trefusis has shown me to entrust his son and heir into marrying a penniless girl, with eight sisters unprovided for."

"I never thought of that," said Mrs. Warrington, rather taken aback.

The barister smiled.

"My dear Bessie, don't take to matchmaking. Hildred seems a nice little girl, and if anyone comes forward to marry her, and she fancies him—well and good; but don't go about trying to find the child a husband, or you will make her life a burden to her, and never be free from worries."

And being not only a sensible woman, but, strange thing in this latter end of the nineteenth century, one who could hear to be told when she made a mistake, Mrs. Warrington promised her husband to give up all idea of trying to provide Hildred with a wedding-ring.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN FRIAR looked at Mrs. May, and the clergyman's wife, understanding the signal, noiselessly left the room. The young doctor quickly followed her downstairs, and signed to her to enter a little room at the end of the passage, used by Mrs. Robson in brighter days as a kind of trying-room for such of her customers as did not insist upon being fitted at their own homes. Mrs. May and John Friar were tried friends. She always said he had saved her youngest girl's life, and he had found in her kindly hospitality his favourite relaxation. He knew he could trust her perfectly, but he was not prepared to see her sink down on a low chair trembling in every limb.

"You are tired out," he said, gently. "this sitting up has been too much for you."

She shook her head.

"I could sit up for nights running and not feel as I do now. Mr. Friar, I am utterly ashamed of myself, but—I was frightened."

He forced her back into the chair, poured out a glass of wine and stood over her while she drank it. Then he said—

"You thought Maitland was his own ghost. Do you know, I guessed it by the way you looked at him. Don't mind my knowing, I will keep the secret; and at this waked hour of the night, with your nerves overstrained, it was quite a natural feeling."

"I know there are no such things as ghosts, but—when I was downstairs getting the tea, I fancied I heard something move in his bedroom."

The doctor nodded.

"I expect he let himself into the house with his latch key, and hid there until the time when the crisis might be expected. It fits in with all I have heard of him, that he should wish to indulge in a theatrical appearance."

"But how did he know Nan was ill?"

"My dear lady," said John gravely, "I'll tell you my opinion, but I must confess Dr. Tucker differs from me entirely. I think this man, Maitland, is about as black a sheep as

you could find. I think he left here because he was weary of that poor child upstairs. He had had enough secret love-making, and he was afraid Mrs. Robson might discover his philandering and bring him to book."

"But having once left, why should he come back?"

"I wish he hadn't. I suppose he heard of Nan's illness, and didn't want to feel himself her murderer; but it is a pity. He's not the sort of man to settle down with a mother-in-law who lets lodgings, and all the sorrow of the parting will come over again."

Mrs. May looked at the door.

"Ought we to go back?"

"No; the girl will probably sleep for hours now. I am going home very soon. I must confess before I see Mrs. Robson I should like to make up my mind about that precious scamp."

Mrs. May looked thoughtful.

"She is a sensible woman, surely she will insist on some explanation of his extraordinary conduct."

"In general, yes; but just now she will only remember he has saved Nan's life, and be ready to believe all he tells her."

"You think he has saved it?"

"I shall be able to speak more positively when I have seen her again; but I think she will pull through."

"I had better go home. Mrs. Robson will not need me now."

But the good widow herself came in then. She thanked them with tears in her eyes, and said Nan was sleeping peacefully, and Mr. Maitland sat watching her as though he couldn't take his eyes off her. Clearly he was in high favour with the mother.

"I hope," said Mrs. May, gently, as she rose to go, "you will have an explanation with Mr. Maitland. Remember, Mrs. Robson, not only has he caused you to suffer untold anxiety about his fate, but he won your child's affections in a most dishonourable manner. Nan's illness lies entirely at his door, and if you mean to sanction her engagement to Mr. Maitland, you ought to understand clearly what he has been doing since he left Delaporte-road last August."

The dressmaker looked troubled.

"I'll do my best, ma'am; but Mr. Maitland's not the sort of man to stand much questioning, and seeing he's saved Nan's life I can't be too hard on him."

Dr. Tucker looked delighted when he heard his partner's account.

"Love is the best physician, John. Depend upon it Maitland will clear up things, and steady down into a good husband."

"You seem to have a very favourable opinion of him, sir," a little sarcastically.

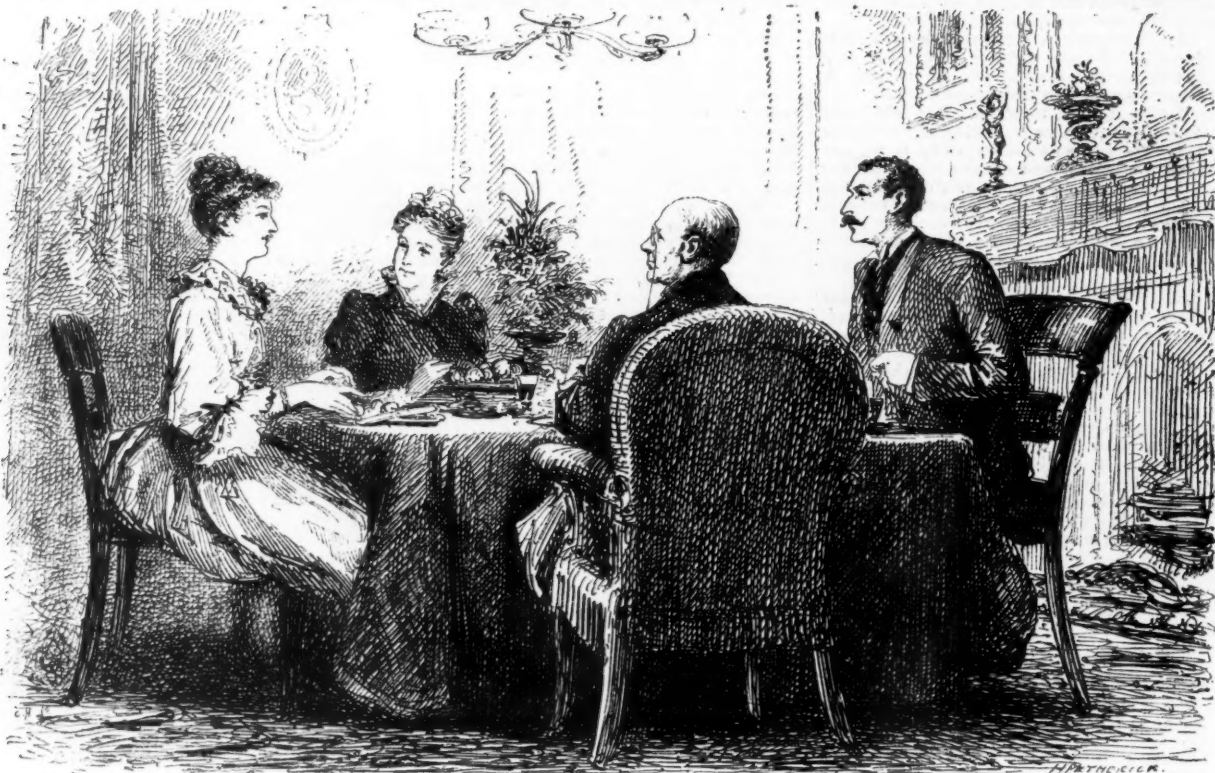
"To tell you the truth I have plied him ever since I went to see Mr. Bartram. I took such an enormous dislike to the millionaire, I felt inclined to approve of anyone in his bad books. I shall try and get an explanation from Maitland myself."

But when he reached Delaporte-road it was to find Nan looking worse than he had last seen her, as she sat up in bed propped up by pillows.

The fever light had died out of her eyes. She was terribly weak and wasted, but she looked more like herself than he had ever hoped to see her, and Mrs. Robson told him everything was right. Mr. Maitland had explained the mystery. She only wished he was there now to see the doctor, but he had been obliged to go into the city on business.

After his visit to the sick room Dr. Tucker expressed a desire to hear the explanation, for it seemed to him simply impossible that Claude Maitland could have had any good excuse to offer for his conduct.

Mrs. Robson's story, short of its ejaculations and protests, was very simple. When he left her house Mr. Maitland had warned her he "might be late." He was then starting for Plymouth, summoned there by his nearest relation, from whom he had considerable expectations. He found his uncle on the



["THE EARL HAS NO CHILDREN. SURELY, CAPTAIN TEEFURIS, YOU MUST BE HIS HEIR!" SAID MRS. WARMINGTON.]

point of starting on a yachting tour, and he begged him to be of the party.

Claude declared it was impossible. He had left home in a hurry, had brought no luggage and so on; but he accepted an invitation to dinner on board the yacht, meaning to return to shore in a boat after the repast.

In going down the steps to the saloon he missed his footing, and fell to the bottom. He was picked up senseless and carried to one of the cabins, where the young surgeon, who was his uncle's private medical attendant, examined him.

This personage declared there was no danger; but that it would be a tedious affair, and the patient might not recover consciousness for days.

Mr. Maitland, the elder, decided to start on the cruise as intended. His nephew would have the best of care and attention, and as soon as ever he was able to be carried on deck the sea air would do wonders for him.

Dr. Tucker listened attentively.

"What was the surgeon's name, Mrs. Robson?"

"I quite forget, sir. Mr. Maitland wrote to us—leastways to Nan—from Madeira. He was conscious then, though quite ill. He gave the letter to one of the sailors to post on shore, and he thinks the man must either have lost it or suppressed it purposely, so as to keep the money given him for the stamp."

Dr. Tucker hesitated. Far-fetched as the story was, he did not like to say it was impossible.

"It seems," went on Mrs. Robson, "in that letter we ought to have had, he told Nan he couldn't be back for some weeks, as his uncle refused to part with him, and being the eldest member of the family, he didn't want to offend him, and he said she was to tell me everything and to say he'd be back before Christmas and they'd get married at once."

Dr. Tucker stared. He began to believe in Mr. Maitland after all. The long string of

offences laid to his charge seemed fading away one by one.

"But how did he hear of Nan's illness?" demanded the doctor. "It seems marvellous he should have arrived last night—in the nick of time."

"Well, sir, he got better very slowly and fretted finely because no letters came, and at last he told his uncle everything, and the old gentleman—he must be real fond of Mr. Maitland—said he'd better come back here and see what was wrong. He couldn't come himself, for he always avoided the English winters, but he sailed the yacht back to Madeira, and Claude caught the steamer for Southampton, and hurried on here by mail. He says he hadn't the least suspicion there was anything serious the matter with Nan, he fancied I was angry at the engagement. He let himself in just as usual; then hearing voices upstairs he felt frightened and came up. He was just at the door when Nan called for him."

"Wonderful!" replied Dr. Tucker, not yet certain whether it was a true story or a monstrous fraud. "And now I suppose Mr. Maitland will stay here, at any rate till Nan is quite herself again."

"He'll stay as long as his uncle can spare him, sir. What he wants is for me to let them be married here by special license, so that he can leave her his wife when he has to go back to the old gentleman."

"That'd be a costly business."

"He says money's no object, sir. He was poor enough when he lived here, because his uncle had quarrelled with him, and cut off his allowance; but now they've made it up, and he's eight hundred a-year. He speaks very nicely, sir. He says he shouldn't like his wife's mother to let lodgings to strangers and that I must let him go on renting the rooms in case he and Nan come home, for they'll have to live mostly abroad. His uncle hates

England, and he can't bear Mr. Claude out of his sight."

Again Dr. Tucker marvelled. That Mrs. Robson believed all she told him was certain; but was the poor woman the victim of a gigantic fraud?

"It will be hard for you to part from your only child, and you used not to like Mr. Maitland."

The widow hesitated.

"Like him! I don't now, sir. That is, I haven't the respect for him I've for you or the Vicar, nor the comfortable friendly feeling I have for my own acquaintances; but Nan's all I've got, and if she can't live away from him, I must give in. Mr. Maitland's devoted to her, and can keep her like a lady. Whatever doubts I have away from him, I forget them when I'm with him, and as he's called Nan back so to say from the grave, it seems almost going against Providence to try to part them."

Slowly down the road walked Dr. Tucker lost in thought. He had more than a chance liking for the honest widow. He had a fatherly regard for Nan. Were they both walking on the edge of a precipice or was it the not uncommon story of a young man of family and fortune ready to sacrifice the world for a pretty face? For the life of him the doctor could not tell.

(To be continued.)

BUTTERMILK as a therapeutic agent is given now to a sick person when nothing else is allowed. It is a powerful nerve tonic. Buttermilk is now considered better than sweet milk for persons inclined to dyspepsia, because one of the difficulties of milk—its slow digestive qualities—is removed at once, as buttermilk has already gone through one process of digestion.



["HESTER, WE MUST UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER, ONCE AND FOR ALL!" SAID MRS. CAMPBELL.]

TWO WOMEN.

CHAPTER III.

HESTER TREFUSIS pushed her way back through the undergrowth of the wood slowly.

She was thinking deeply; her thoughts would have surprised Richard, Lord Tanso, could he have followed them, for they dwelt mostly upon him and were very earnest thoughts indeed.

"It is a good face," the girl mused. "I can see the likeness to my poor kind old friend. He has soul and honour in his eyes; he looks one well in the face. I like his voice too. It rings sound. I would trust him." She stopped and plucked some pink wild flower growing luxuriantly at her feet. "Of how many could I say such a thing?" she said to herself, sorrowfully, bitterly. She stood motionless, playing unconsciously with the flower she held in her hand; then, with a quick, sharp sigh, she thrust the weed into the bosom of her grey gown and went forward again.

"What use to cry over such things?" she said, wearily. "Do I make them any better? Can I change mankind—reform humanity?" She shook her head.

"I can only cling to the few pearls left to me; thank Heaven, I have some. They are still pure and soft-toned and white, even in this atmosphere of moral darkness."

The scornful look came once more into her eyes and about her nobly cut mouth.

"And so the old game is to be played again, only for bigger stakes. He is worthy a better fate. Perhaps he will not be so easily blinded—and yet—"

Again she shook her head.

"The fight is not even; how can the strongest honesty stand against the weapons that will be used? I am sorry for him; if there is only a quarter the nature of that dead

man in him, he is worthy of deep regard, deep respect. I should treasure his friendship, but—"

She broke off again in her thoughts. She was reaching the end of the wood; there was a Swiss wooden summer-house close by. She sat down on one of the seats and looked at the sunset gliding and burning the sky.

"If only I could have faith in Violet! If I could understand her a little better! There is something beneath that babyish manner, but I can never touch it. Is she better or worse than I think? Is there a real true beat in her heart? I wish I could think good of her. She is so beautiful. Everyone loves her, everyone believes in her, everyone calls her an angel. Why must I alone doubt her? Is there something bitter and bad in my nature that makes me do this?" Hester asked herself, passionately. "I have tried so hard to love her when we were little in the old days, before my father went, how hard I tried to love Violet! I can remember how I used to cry because something rose up in my heart and told me she was bad. I have tried to fight that something down all these years, but it lives and lives. What a difference my life would have been if I could have loved Violet. I could have borne with much, with nearly everything, if I could have loved Violet and believed in her. The utter loneliness without daddy, the misery of daily existence with that woman, the disappointments, the disillusionments, the heart's pangs, none of them would have been so bitter if this one beautiful thing had been given me; but she frightens me."

The girl's two big dark eyes were fixed on the rose coloured sky. They had expanded with the force of her thought. They looked almost too big for the pale fallow face.

"There is no good in her; she laughs, she shines almost in her beauty, but she is not real. She is hard, and cruel, and strong. She is not a baby, she is a giant. I do not under-

stand her; but alas! alas! I doubt her. I know she is not true."

Hester bent forward, her slender hands clasped between her knees.

"It is so horrible!" she said, speaking aloud in her emotion, in a low worried voice. "She is so beautiful, she should be an angel. Her mother is beautiful, too; but I do not think she would ever have deceived me—she bears her nature in her face—but Violet, Violet deceives them all. Even poor George Campbell believed in her. He called her a little child, and pitied her for her lot in having such a mother. Sometimes I think I get hard and cold and bitter, living all alone as I do. I must grow better. Oh! I must! I must!"

The girl rose to her feet suddenly, passing her hand over her eyes, and her face transfigured into beauty by the passion of her thoughts.

"I must make a difference; I must begin to plan. I am no longer a child, I must act for myself. I will go out into the world and fight my way in it. I do not want my money; let her keep it. I want nothing but courage and my pearls. I will carry my pearls of hope and faith and illusion with me wherever I may go. Who knows if I may not find more by the wayside. I am weary of thinking and reading, and thinking again. While that kind good old man lived it was different. He loved me, and he helped me, and I would have stayed on near him for ever; but now—now the place is barren and desolate to me. I have nothing—no one since he was laid in his grave. My books can help me no more—it is time to act, not dream. I will go out into the world. I will seek and find happiness in work. Here I shall never have an hour free from the cancer of doubt, of bitter unrest, of disgust and contempt. God made me for a better life than this." Hester Trefusis cried, turning her soul-lit eyes to the sinking sun. "I must break aside the cords that are eating into my brain and heart. I must be free. I

must do some good, and so glorify the Great One who has made me!"

She stood with her slender hands clasped together, pressed against her beating heart. The splendour of the setting sun shone on her queenly young figure; on her head with its coronet of dark hair; on her pale eloquent face with its luminous stars, its windows of her soul; on the beautiful red lips, so sweet and so pure. She was the figure of a saint of bygone time as she stood there. The illumination of her noble thoughts, her lofty aspirations, was revealed in every line of her face and figure.

Violet, coming dancing through the brush-wood, singing lightly to herself, stopped suddenly as she caught sight of her stepsister, a curious look falling over her lovely face, and her song ceasing all at once on her lips. She looked at Hester steadily, cynically.

"Beside me," she said to herself, "she is plain, yellow, uninteresting, even with those two great eyes of hers she is nothing. She cannot stand beside me. Yet—what am I really compared to her? I hate her, I hate her," Violet said suddenly in her heart, with a passion that was fierce and unreasoning. "I want to know that I am better than she. I want to feel myself that I could put my foot upon her and crush her in the mud; and I cannot—I cannot. No matter how I deceive the others, I do not deceive her. She sees through me, and she despises me, though she cannot tell why. If she should ever know—if it should ever come out!"

The girl pressed her hands over her lips; they had suddenly grown cold. She did not often lose her nerve, she had that happy knack of dancing on the edge of an open grave. The skeleton was there not very far down, but what cared Violet; it was a skeleton, it could not rise and denounce her, and while she danced above it who would or could suspect its existence? But at this moment her laughing callousness went from her.

There was something in the prepossessing dignity and nobility surrounding Hester, as she stood there lost in her soul-like dreams, that pierced through the outer garment of Violet's utter selfishness and worthlessness, and brought her face to face with the truth of her life and herself, giving her a distinctly disagreeable and miserable sensation.

But nature was too strong within her to be silenced long; almost as soon as it was born, Violet threw aside the feeling. "With a right laugh she jumped out of the thick carpet of weeds and jank grass.

"Well, dreamer of dreams," she cried, aiming at and striking Hester with a rosebud she had gathered and broken in her usual wanton fashion. "Are you not frightened to stare so hard at the sun, Hester?" she went on in her childish way. "I am sure it must hurt your eyes; I could not do it."

Hester had awakened from her sort of thought-trance with a sudden start. She looked for a moment at the radiant young figure beside her.

The red rays of the sinking orb sent a glow of ruddy glory over Violet's exquisite beauty, etherealizing it and accentuating it wonderfully.

She did not look like common human flesh as she stood smiling and swaying to and fro like some delicate flower in the glorious light.

"Now you are staring at me like a great owl, Hester," she cried, and she pretended to pout. "Is there anything the matter? Have I changed suddenly? Why do you stare so hard?"

"You are very beautiful," Hester said in a slow, dreamy way; and then after a slight pause she added, "You are not changed."

Violet's delicate face flushed at the first words; no amount of admiration was too great for her. A curious look came quickly at the last.

"What a funny creature you are to be sure; quite like a witch or a fairy, who lives in woods and places, and talks to trees and stones. I don't believe you are a girl really, Hester; I think you must be a witch," and

she ended with a laugh. Then she began to dance away again. "Mamma sent me to find you, she wants to speak to you. I think she is vexed because you did not come to be introduced to Lord Thurso. Why would you not come, Hester? He is so nice—big and brown; and he is so shy, and goes red all over his face when he speaks. He made me laugh, but I liked him."

All this was said with that assumption of childishness which sat so naturally and so prettily upon Violet, and which so cleverly deceived everyone—from her mother upwards and downwards—that is everyone except her stepsister Hester.

Hester made no answer to all this. She followed the slight, pink-robed figure in silence all they emerged on to the lower edge of the lawn.

"There is mamma; she is quite cross," said Violet, "I can see her frowning from here. Oh! I am glad it is you who are going to be scolded instead of poor little me. I should be so frightened!"

Hester's lip curled unconsciously. It was in a moment like this she despised this other girl so much, and felt baffled and wearied at the added proof of Violet's curious cunning nature.

She said nothing with her lips, but her eyes were so eloquent in their silent contempt that Violet realised again that uncomfortable sensation which Hester Trefusis and Hester alone was capable of producing in her.

"I wish she would go away. Why does mother insist on making her stay?" Violet said to herself as Hester left her and walked across the lawn with her proud easy bearing, to where Mrs. Campbell sat. "Surely we can live without her miserable money, especially now that we are going to stay on here. I never used to mind her so much, though I have always hated her and her big staring eyes; but now—"

Violet was walking in a side path. There was no one to see her, so she dropped her usual dancing gait, and the smiles were brushed from her face.

"She is different than she used to be. She grows stronger—she is not afraid of mamma. She looks her contempt as clearly as though she spoke it. Why does not mother send her away—let her live somewhere else? She must go. I want it. I will work it. I will speak to mamma to-night. So long as she kept to herself and did not bother me I didn't care; but now—" Violet shivered suddenly. "I begin to feel as if I should go mad with those two great dark eyes burning into me, and searching my heart of hearts all the time, it is horrible!"

Hester Trefusis walked straight up to where Mrs. Campbell's golden head rested on the cushioned back of the chair. There was an uncompromising sternness about the girl.

"You wished to speak to me," she said, in her quiet low voice that had a touch of pathetic music in every note.

Mrs. Campbell looked at her, her brows meeting in a frown.

Words could not convey the fullness of the woman's dislike towards this girl. She hated her for many and many a reason, not the least of these being the knowledge which was not to be denied, that Hester had every promise about her girlish personality of possessing, and that at no far date, beauty of a kind and of an extent that would be dangerous in every sense of the word to herself, and to Violet, her child.

She hated Hester also, and this time more deeply, because in a curious, scarcely to be defined way, she feared the girl.

On the surface of things it may sound extraordinary that a woman such as she, strong, self-reliant, clever beyond all description, could find anything to fear in a younger nature—a nature that was immature, chaotic as it were, weak in its strength, divided in its crushing sense of ignorance and loneliness, a nature that was in her power too. And yet the fact remained; Helen Campbell feared her, step-

daughter—feared this curiously quiet almost taciturn girl with her searching dark grey eyes, her resolute lips which could not form themselves to utter anything but the truth, her extraordinary pride, her eloquent silence; she was a perpetual reproach to the hard, scheming, worldly adventuress whom poor dead George Campbell had worshipped as an angel for a few weeks.

If Helen Campbell could have thrust the girl out of her sight for ever, out of the golden future she was building up, and had built up, so successfully for herself, and for Violet, she would not have hesitated to do it long before this, but she was not a free agent where Hester was concerned. Without this girl she would be without the money that was as much a necessity to her sordid extravagant luxurious soul as bread is to the body.

Before she had met George Campbell she had had little or nothing beyond this yearly income of Hester's to live upon, and even now—well, the beautiful white hands clenched themselves sometimes, as she realised how little her last marriage had done for her in a monetary, or indeed in any sense. Apart from his landed property, George Campbell had not been a moneyed man, although she had made every inquiry and imagined a very different state of affairs when she had plotted to become his wife; indeed, when his death had come suddenly, Helen Campbell found things worse than had for all that would come to her was a paltry few hundreds.

She inherited as her widow's portion the regular income, and the rest of the property passed entirely to the Earl of Thurso, the dead man's nephew and heir at law in default of direct male issue.

It can be easily understood then, how much depended to the widow on the effect she could produce on the young Earl, and also how necessary it was to cling to the five hundred a year that was Hester Trefusis's small fortune bequeathed her by her father. The fact that Hester was perfectly conscious of her proper value in the household did not tend to endear her to her stepmother, but she evil had to be borne until Hester had attained her twenty-first year, and she was now barely eighteen.

Mrs. Campbell, however, every now and then experienced a distinct spark of malicious delight, in that she found means of making the girl suffer some mortification and pain which was none the less keen, because it was borne in absolute patience and silence. She had always hated the girl, as we have said; even when Hester had been a tiny child, she had hated her; she had been jealous of her, jealous of the passionate joy, handsome next to go well, broken down Jack Trefusis had lavished on the child. He had married Helen Dacre, simply and solely to give a mother's care and tenderness to his little Hester, deceived by the woman's saint-like beauty, but he had never really cared for her; he had been the one man, indeed, who had resisted the powerful spell Helen had exercised so fully upon the others. He had had no love for anyone but for Hester, and it had not been for the fact that death had set his grim stamp upon the man, Trefusis would never have taken to himself another wife—the heart of his heart lay buried in the grave of Hester's young mother—but with the knowledge weighing upon him that he was a doomed man, that his days were numbered, that he had no one to whom he could bequeath the most precious legacy his dead love had left him, and woeed and blinded by the madonna-like beauty of the woman whom chance threw in his path in a small continental gambling town, Jack Trefusis made an offer of marriage to the delicate golden-haired widow alone in the world save for her baby girl, and suggested they should form a home together for the sake of the children.

He asked no questions about the woman's past, he sought to know nothing. He accepted her as she appeared to him—sweet, gentle, good, a true woman—and the day she became his wife, he drew a deep sigh of

relief, for he imagined he had made a happy provision for his darling little Hester's future. Years before he had put himself adrift from his home, from his family, his friends. There was no good in him, people said. He would stick to nothing. He was a born gambler; he lived for play and play alone.

The true story of his life was never told: the treasure of his love; the agony of his loss; the birth of his child at the same moment as his young wife's death—a wife whom he had worshipped and loved a very angel.

None of these things ever travelled back to England. He had meant to have made a struggle to reanimate himself in his former position when he had first met his girl-wife. For her sake he would renounce his old paths, that were so weary, so desolate, so unprofitable. But alas! Death the Reaper garnered away the fair soul that had begun to work such good; and Jack Trefusis fell back in his despair, even farther than he had been before.

Apart from the stinging hurt to her vanity that this man was utterly indifferent to her and her beauty, there was another source of anger to Helen Trefusis in her marriage with Helen's father.

Despite her every effort, she could not move her husband to make the faintest step towards that reanimation of himself that she knew from his own lips had been his hope and intention during his first marriage. If he could have done so much for a "patroness" of a governess, which was how she designated Hester's mother, why should he not do it for her? It was his story, his old and honored name that had first attracted her to him.

From her earliest days Helen Trefusis had had one wild dream of ambition, to mount to the highest rung of the social ladder, and mix with the great people of the world. Money she worshipped also, but money was only a means to an end. Given her remarkable beauty with a strong ally to help her, she could not possibly fail, she told herself—she must realize a glorious future. This future she determined should come through Hester's father and the social advantages of his name and family; but she was soon disappointed.

Trefusis, already dying, refused to hold any intercourse whatsoever with his people. They had cast him off; so he would remain cast off to the end. Helen must put all such ideas out of her mind once and for all. Not even for his child's sake—for little Hester—who was the very motive of his poor weak existence, would he do this thing.

The scenes of passion that followed on this determination hastened the dying man's end. He passed away one night quite unexpectedly. It may be, had he lived, and had strength he would have struggled to have made some different provision for his child—have even approached his family and besought their pity and sympathy for the orphan; but he died too soon.

Hester was left unconditionally in Helen Trefusis's charge, the sole barrier being the fact that the dead man's money, although here for her use during Hester's minority, must eventually become the girl's property on her attaining her twenty-first year.

It is only natural to suppose that Hester's stepmother would have kept this arrangement a secret from the girl, and indeed have represented to her that she was an object of charity. But, unfortunately for Mrs. Trefusis's plans, the lawyer who had been the sole administrator of this money during Jack Trefusis's lifetime, continued to act in the same capacity after his death; and as he, and he alone, out of all the folk in England had been made aware of the first marriage and of Hester's existence, it was an impossibility for the scheming woman to do anything in the matter beyond using the money to further her own ends, and sparing as little as she possibly could for Hester's requirements.

It will be seen then that she had good cause, from her point of view, for hating her step-child. There was the hurt to her vanity in

that on Hester was lavished the love she so arrogantly regarded should be hers by right. The fact of Hester's aristocratic birth and connections was another bitter point; the existence of the lawyer who had the impudence to take a keen interest in his young client's career, another; the knowledge of Hester's unconcealed aversion to her, as a child, that had grown into scorn and loathing of her now that she child was a girl and understood the meaning of things; all these, and much more, made this young creature so noble in her unconcealed goodness, so proud, so refined, so superior in every sense to herself—absolutely detestable in her step-mother's eyes.

"You wish to speak to me, Mrs. Campbell?" Hester repeated, coldly, as a long silence followed on her first query.

Helen Campbell woke from her train of bitter thought, and looked at the girl with her hazel eyes clearly in her blue eyes—the eyes that had seemed so beautiful, gentle and sweet to Lord Thurso only an hour before.

"Yes, I wish to speak to you," she said, curiously. "I wish to know the meaning of your worse than ill-mannered conduct this afternoon. I suppose you are aware you made a pleasant exhibition of yourself. I believe Lord Thurso imagined you were a lunatic, you certainly looked like one!"

CHAPTER IV.

The girl stood silent a moment, and Mrs. Campbell flashed hotly at that silence. It was so very eloquent, it conveyed so much plainer than words the quiet contempt aroused by her vulgar speech.

It was only in moments like this that Mrs. Campbell allowed her vein of vulgarity to force its way through the veneer of social polish and charm she had acquired and adjusted to such perfection.

"Well," she said, angrily, as the girl said nothing, "why don't you speak? I am waiting for your explanation."

"I have none to give," Hester said, very quietly.

"You are a charming young person. You give yourself any amount of airs and graces, you arrogate to yourself a pride that is wholly incomprehensible, remembering who and what you are."

Mrs. Campbell was very fond of making this sort of vague accusation against Hester's parentage. It relieved her, although she was fully aware that had the girl chosen to retort, which she never did, she could have disposed of the insulting remark in a moment; for from her mother's side, no less than her father's, she had the blood of an old and honorable race flowing in her veins.

Hester's absolute silence to whatever her stepmother chose to say on the subject was like a red rag in a bull, it roused Helen Campbell's angry hatred further and further.

"Let me tell you, Hester, once and for all, that if you insist upon obtruding yourself upon the notice of my friends and guests, I shall expect you to show some semblance of decent education. I have spent enough upon you, Heaven knows," Mrs. Campbell added coarsely.

"You have had two years' magnificent tuition at that school in Paris, and yet you cannot even behave like a Christian, much less like a lady. Look at Violet, she is a perfect example to you, her two years' schooling has not been wasted. Perhaps you will say that I spent more on Violet's education than I did on you; if so, you make a very big mistake. Your convent school cost just double what Violet's did. You can see the accounts for yourself if you don't believe me."

Hester still stood perfectly silent—her tall graceful figure drawn up in its usual proud manner, the small hands hanging loosely clasped together, those dark, magnificent eyes fixed on Mrs. Campbell's flashed angry face.

The elder woman rose suddenly from her chair.

"Hester," she said, calmping the irritation out of her voice with a strong effort as of one who had made a great repulsion. "Hester, it has come to this between us; we must understand one another, you and I, once and for all!"

"She stood in front of the girl. She was of more than ordinary stature, but Hester was her equal in height; the dark grey stars, fires of truth, honesty, sincerity, nobility, looked into the large blue falsehoods before them."

"I understand you perfectly, Mrs. Campbell," the girl said very coldly, very quietly.

"Helen Campbell's face flashed, and then paled. She bit her full, red lip; a sense of hopelessness oppressed her all at once. Fight as she would, she would never crush this girl, nor would she ever win her. It was a horrible mortification to such a nature to realize this, but day by day Helen Campbell was realizing it more fully."

"You have the advantage of me, then," she retorted, "for I do not understand you in the very least. I never met anyone like you before, and I have no desire to come across another of your species."

Mrs. Campbell folded her arms over her bosom, and began moving to and fro in front of the girl, her long black dress making a soft, rustling noise on the grass as it trailed after her.

"I shall have to adopt drastic measures, I see," she said, letting her usual common-sense reasoning subdue her anger. "I am very sorry, Hester, but you have yourself to thank for it. You have grown so difficult and stubborn, and you have had so much your own way of late that I suppose you have been allowing yourself to imagine that you are grown up and independent of all restraint on correction, and can therefore comport yourself as it pleases you best, adopting the rudest, most hostile manner to me, your natural and legal guardian, and endeavouring to make a scandal among my servants and friends by your extraordinary behaviour. You have made a slight mistake my dear child, a slight mistake."

Mrs. Campbell turned her head to smile at the girl whose eyes still stared on her, and I begin to think I have made one too. I have allowed you too much liberty of thought and action. I have been too kind. I have endeavoured to find in you the same gentle youth and innocence that lives in my own child. Nature has unfortunately not blessed you in this respect. You are no more like my Violet than this chair is like that tree. Of course, I do not expect to find such nature as hers everywhere, but I do and did expect to find something a little nearer and higher in a girl who has received such advantages as you have. I am disappointed."

Mrs. Campbell waved one shapely hand in the air.

"Life is full of disappointments, and instead of being able to associate you with myself and my child in the close communion of our happy, daily life I must allow you a place apart from us until such times as I see some change for the better. I reserve extremely I ever permitted you to leave your studies and sit so much with Mr. Campbell. It has had a most deleterious effect on you, I am sorry to see, and, after all, your strong affection and interest in my late husband have brought you no reward, you see."

Once more the anger flamed out on the fair comely face. George Campbell's love for Hester had been a bitter spring to his wife, and a sneer disfigured the beautiful lip.

"You might have spared yourself many a weary hour toiling over his manuscripts and books in a stuffy library on a hot day. It is such a pity you had not known, is it not? for you would have really saved yourself any amount of trouble. Certainly your labour deserved some reward, and Mr. Campbell showed very little gratitude when he left your name out of the list of legacies. However, we must all buy our experience, and you have bought yours in this case, pretty dearly; while I also am a sufferer, for, if I had put a

stop to your close intercourse with Mr. Campbell, doubtless I should have found you more possible, more agreeable, and more obedient than you are now!"

The woman's handsome figure moved on restlessly up and down. The girl never stirred. Her face had grown, if possible, a little paler, and her lips had a drawn, pained look. It was her only answer to the base and mean charge levelled at her in the last part of the speech.

"Therefore, my dear Hester, as I wish to guard myself and my guests from a repetition of conduct such as you bestowed upon us this afternoon, and as I should like to prevent you from taking upon yourself fresh labours with others in the same spirit as you worked for George Campbell, I shall adopt measures to confine you for a time to one particular part of the house. I should be sorry to see you develop a similar interest for Lord Thurso such as you showed so plainly for his uncle, and so—"

"You go too far, Mrs. Campbell!" Hester said, suddenly. Her voice was intensely quiet, very low; but with a subdued passion in each note that told how the proud, sensitive nature was suffering. "You go too far!"

"Indeed, really?" Mrs. Campbell laughed disagreeably, "you think so?" She suddenly changed her manner. "Well, let me tell you, Hester Trefusis, it is my intention to go much farther, as far, in fact, as I like. You are my ward, and you are left in my charge. Until you are twenty one you are mine absolutely and unconditionally. Do you understand me?—mine! to order and to punish as I like, to be subject to my will and my pleasure, to be made happy or made miserable!"

"Heaven forgive you!" Hester cried, suddenly and brokenly, for with all her pride she was only a girl, and this sudden assertion of her dependence struck at the root of her courage and her strength. "Heaven forgive you. You are a wicked woman, and as you treat me, so will you be treated by the One who is above us and knows the secrets of all hearts. I am in your power, as you say, but I will not be afraid. I will trust in Heaven and pray it may protect me and move your wickedness and bring you to repentance."

A touch of colour burned on either pale cheek. The fire of faith, of suffering shone in the splendid eyes. Mrs. Campbell stood looking after the girl as she turned suddenly and moved hurriedly away.

The woman had grown very pale; like all intensely selfish, sinful natures, she was highly superstitious. Hester's religion, the girl's strongly accentuated faith, her purity of spirit, her yearnings and strivings, all these were some things that were never revealed to her stepmother, and, indeed, would scarcely be understood by her, so that the fervour, the absolute faith that rang in each clearly uttered word seemed laden with prophecy to the woman's worldly case-hardened heart and made her distinctly uncomfortable for the moment. She stood watching Hester's graceful form disappear, full of an unusual uneasy gloom, and it was with a sharp quick sigh of relief and pleasure that she turned to greet Violet, who was running up to her.

"My little one," she said, fondly throwing her arm about the girl's slender figure. "My darling!"

"You look tired, mummy dear. Has Hester made you very very cross? I know she is silly and stupid, but she can't help it, poor Hester! I hope you didn't scold her very much, mamma; say that that you did not, please."

Mrs. Campbell pressed a kiss on the silky-golden curls.

"I have to be cross with Hester. She is a bad-natured girl, not like my baby who knows no wrong. If only Hester had a little of my Violet's goodness!"

"Perhaps Hester wants some more school, mummy."

Violet's little hands were playing with a jewelled bangle on her mother's wrist.

"You know she is younger than me—though it does seem funny, doesn't it, when you think of it?—and she can't come out yet, can she? She does love her silly old books so much. I believe she would be so happy at school again, mummy darling."

Mrs. Campbell said nothing for a moment. The suggestion was distinctly a good one, it would relieve the difficulty in every way. Get Hester out of sight, and indeed this would be more than ever necessary, for the woman could not blind herself to the fact that her stepchild was about to prove a veritable danger, a social fire-brand, a problem almost beyond solving, and remove her in a way that could not possibly rouse either suspicion or ire on the part of Mr. Chetwynde, the lawyer who administered the small estate Jack Trefusis had left behind him.

Mrs. Campbell's quick brain worked swiftly. It could be managed very economically too. Why not utilise the girl's talents as her mother's had been before, and make her a sort of governess? That would cost little; though, after all the money side of the question did not press so much at this moment as it might have done, since Thurso loomed so clearly and distinctly on the horizon of the future.

"My little Violet is a clever baby," the mother said, caressingly. "I have a shrewd suspicion she has guessed the best way to settle Hester for a time at least. I think I will write to your old schoolmistress, Madame Dupont, and ask her whether—"

Violet's fingers left the diamond bangle quickly.

"Oh! mother," she cried, and a close observer would have seen a sudden contraction on her lovely face. "Oh! no, no; poor Hester! Oh! she would be miserable at old Dupont's—miserable! and she would learn nothing, and cost such a lot. Oh! send her somewhere else, mummy. I don't want poor Hester to be miserable. It is because I want to know she is happy as I am, that I suggest about her going to school. I know she would be most unhappy with Mrs. Dupont; they would quarrel all the time. Besides, why must Hester go to Paris? Let her be much nearer, mummy—somewhere in England; in the country somewhere, where I can go and see her on half holidays and take her sweets, and cook can make her nice things. Oh! that would be lovely!" And Violet clapped her small hands together in great glee.

"What a baby you are, Violet!" her mother said; but there was no reproach in her voice.

"But I am right if I am a baby, mummy. You cannot say I am wrong; now can you?"

The mother kissed the laughing lips. You are never wrong, my darling," she said; and then she was called away by one of the gardeners, and the subject of Hester was dropped, and Violet was left alone.

The girl stood whisking a flower about in her hands, she had a knack of curling flowers just to destroy them—her hands that had grown suddenly cold, and she shivered once as though an icy wind had touched her.

"Dupont's! Hester go to Dupont's! It would be ruin; it would be worse than ruin. I must stop that, whatever happens. What could have put such an idea into mamma's head? It made me sick for the moment. I must always be prepared then. On every side, in every way I must be prepared. Oh! I could curse myself for my madness," the girl cried fiercely. "Yes; I was mad—I must have been mad. If I could only forget it all; if I could feel it was all forgotten! Oh! I would give everything I possess, even my beauty, to know the past was dead, utterly, utterly dead!" She flung the poor broken flower away roughly, and began walking slowly towards the house. "It must be dead; it shall be dead," she said doggedly. "It lives only in my memory. I am clever, I can do most things; I will kill that memory. From to-day, I will take an oath, I will never let that miserable folly trouble me any more. It

is only nervousness that makes me such a coward. Once I am Thurso's wife—"

She drew a deep breath, and then laughed. The colour flashed into her cheek and eyes again, and the song came back to her lips as the glorious picture of the future, called up by this last thought rolled before her mind's eye.

From her mother Violet inherited her dreams of social grandeur, but she desired even more than her mother had done. Helen Campbell only longed to mingle with the great ones of the earth. Her child dreamed and determined to be one of these great ones herself. As Thurso's wife the future would be more than gloriously realized, and in the keen pleasure of anticipation, of participation in the possible splendour of such a future, the past, with its record of folly, shame and wrong was, as she had decreed it should be, thrust into the background and was forgotten.

Lord Thurso had little or no opportunity of giving his sister Alice a detailed account of his visit to his uncle's widow at Sedgebrooke. When he reached the big gloomy town-house of the Thurso family he found a certain commotion proceeding, and learnt to his regret that had news had arrived from his eldest sister in Scotland, and that his mother and Lady Alice had determined to start at once and administer personal sympathy and assistance to the invalid in her trouble.

There was therefore barely more than a sentence or two exchanged between Lady Alice and her brother. In the bustle of packing and arranging many matters for her mother, Lady Alice had no time to inquire about Mrs. Campbell, and heard in a distinct and vague way the few enthusiastic words Thurso uttered; she also took the letter Hester had confided to his care without realising hardly what it was she was accepting.

"Something from poor Uncle George? Oh! I will take it with me, and write and tell you all about it. Thurso, I wonder if you would go and ask Barnes to come to me?"

And poor Lady Alice's whole brain and thoughts had to return again to the important matter of the moment; and anyone who had ever assisted Lady Thurso to undertake a railway journey would understand most fully what an importance this matter was.

Ah! this was naturally disappointing to the young man. He had been looking forward, during his journey back to town, to his interview with his sister, and the pleasure he would derive from her quick sympathy and understanding.

Of course, he immediately began to sketch a future bond of love and admiration between Lady Alice and Violet. He took keen pleasure in picturing Allie's surprise and delight in Violet's extraordinary loveliness. Two such sweet girls could not fail to be enchanted with one another, and be drawn instantly into the warmest and closest friendship, he said to himself.

There were no very definite ideas as to the future in Thurso's brain at this moment; he was in fact in a state of mental chaos, being unable to think even clearly or steadily while the pictured memory of that delicate beauty lived perpetually before his eyes, blinding his vision and stultifying his senses.

He did all sorts of foolish things, and made his valet stare by the mistakes he made while he was dressing for dinner. Then, when he got to his dinner at the club, after he had seen his mother and sister safely departed with a retinue of servants and a pyramid of luggage, he made an extraordinary discovery: he could not eat—he felt as if he should never want to eat again.

It was a very funny experience, and it made him smile—in fact he could not help smiling all the time; he was so strangely, so ridiculously happy—happy in a way he had never been before. And it was certainly very wrong of him to be so happy and radiant when his sister, Lady Emma Talbot, was

that moment lying dangerously ill in her home in Scotland.

Thurso pulled himself up every now and then and looked grave, and said several times to himself,—

"Poor Emmie—poor old Em! I do hope things are not so bad with her!"

And then he would give a thought to Lady Alice, and pity her too for her long, tiresome journey.

But his mind could not dwell on these things long; back his thoughts would fly to the pretty old-fashioned lawn at Sedgebrook, to the red and white striped tent, to the daintily set tea-table, to Mrs. Campbell's suave, smiling beauty, and to the dancing, graceful, bewitching loveliness of that young creature with her sun-kissed hair, and her eyes of heaven's own blue. He simply could not forget her—not that he wanted to.

He never remembered to have sat so late at his dinner before; the club was half empty, the diners were all satisfied, and the clock was chiming eleven when he pushed his chair away from the table, and rose to go out.

He had some few engagements—not many, because of the family mourning for his uncle, but still a few, and if he had chosen to think in such a strain Richard Lord Thurso might have told himself very truthfully that at those few houses he would be a most welcome and honoured guest.

Thurso was, in fact, one of the eligible young bachelors of the season. His wealth was by no means great, but he had enough for his position; and his uncle's death had increased his possessions also, as has before been said.

He was, moreover, a prime favourite. Everyone liked Thurso, and the women admired him immensely. He could have chosen a wife from several of the prettiest and daintiest debutantes of this year, and, perhaps, of others; but up to this day he had not given the subject of marriage much thought. He knew, of course, he would have to marry—it was the proper thing to do, and Thurso had always fulfilled every duty expected of him; but he had been in no hurry. No one woman or girl had ever seemed to him more desirable than the rest.

He had not met one who had ever disturbed his thoughts or pictured herself on his mind in the smallest manner until this bright June day when he had come unexpectedly into the presence of one who instantly and almost fatally had gone straight into the most sacred and beautiful corner of this man's great, honest, noble heart.

The force of the fascination was all the greater because of the freshness of the material to be worked upon.

Had Thurso been of the calibre of the numerous young men about him he would have been able to sort out his emotions and qualify his delight. He would have commenced to weigh the pleasures in the scale with common sense. He would have seen the flaws even when the jewel glistened most brightly; have determined on a course of action that should be agreeable but not dangerous. Being, however, what he was—a man with a very limited knowledge of the shady side of life, a man who had preserved a degree of unsophistication and youthfulness in all his thoughts and actions—Thurso did none of these things. He succumbed to the strange strong power that had attacked him so swiftly and unexpectedly; he troubled himself about nothing more.

As he walked home to the big old-fashioned house and let himself in with a latch-key, he had arrived at only one goal on the pathway of his new experience, he had grasped but one fact, and that the most vital, the most absolute.

He told himself he loved this blue-eyed Violet—loved her with all the wealth of his soul, of his heart, of his mind—and that before many days had gone he would lay that love at her little feet and ask her to become his wife.

(To be continued.)

A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XI.

BRENDA'S excitement did not communicate itself to the stoical workman whose arm she had grasped in her excitement. He drew his old and much-battered son'-wester down further over his eyes, and looked in the direction in which she pointed.

"Danged if it ain't a woman!" he exclaimed, slowly. "A nice cold bath she's had to be sure!"

"Is she dead?" asked Brenda, hoarsely. "Dead? As dead as a herring! D'y'e think a gal could live long under 'water like this? Hi, Dick! bring yer boat-hook up here quick!"

The man addressed as Dick had already looked over the water and had seen the dark object floating in. He started after the boat-hook, but before he had reached it the water had first washed the body out, and then sent it almost to the feet of the watchers upon the wharf.

Few of the workmen, save the one to whom Brenda had spoken and the one addressed as Jim, had seen what had happened, and went on with their work with an indifference that was appalling.

The man seized the dress of the woman, torn in places and freezing even as the biting wind struck it, and drew it out of the water. The face was upturned, the eyes wide open, a horrible, ghastly sort of smile having settled upon the features. The hair was dark, and, dripping as it was, curled about the brow in tiny rings that gave the face an expression of childishness that was piteous. But the face was so swollen and distorted by that awful smile that it bore no resemblance to anything earthly, and Brenda shrunk back with a suppressed gasp as her eye fell upon it.

And it was to drown like that that she had come to this terrible place. Ah, surely Heaven had sent her this ghastly vision to save her soul that sin! She grasped the workman's arm to prevent herself from falling, and he looked curiously into her face. "Tain't a purty sight, is it?" he asked. "It allurs makes a woman sick to look at a drowned person, and yet when one of 'em wants to die they mostly does it that way. Now, you'd look jist like that gal if you was 'drowned."

Brenda shrunk back. "I should?" she whispered. "Yes. The eyes is the same colour and so is the hair, even down to the dress. D'y'e think you'd like to look like that?"

"Great heavens! What are you saying?" "A heap o' truth, my gal, when I tell you that death ain't no easy thing to face. They ain't no trouble in all this world that ain't easier bore than death. I saw in your eyes the minute you come what was in your head."

"What do you mean?" "You never meant to leave this place alive; but I had my eye on yer. You wouldn't a got fur, but it was jist a little fuder than the Lord meant you to go. Now, you take this here as a lesson, and go home and take the trouble like a Christian that Heaven sends to you, an' in its own good time it brings you out all right, if it ain't in no other way than through death. Here comes Jim."

Brenda could not have spoken if her life had depended upon it. She stood there, cold and still, looking down into the rigid features, her face not less ghastly than that of the dead. She heard with curious distinctness all that was spoken near her, but it seemed to her that she could not have spoken if her life had depended upon it.

"You stay here, Jim," the first man said, "until I go over there and call the police. That ain't no use in a-trying to do nothin' for her. she's as dead as a herring."

He started off even as he spoke, and his back was barely turned when some awful thought seemed to flash through Brenda's

brain. Her white cheeks flushed, a brilliant fire leaped into her eyes.

"There could be no sin in it," she whispered, to her own heart. "Heaven has sent me a substitute. I will accept it! I shall see my baby again."

She turned eagerly to the man Dick. "I can't bear to see her lying here like this!" she exclaimed, hoarsely. "Get something to put over her."

"Bat, ma'am—" "If it is only a coat, or an old horse-blanket, or anything, it will be better than nothing. Here is a shilling if you will hurry."

She thrust the money into his hand. It was persuasion enough for Jim, who had neither the penetration nor the conscience of the other man. He left her at once.

Brenda glanced about her hastily, swiftly. She was partially concealed from those who were coming toward her by the end of the pier. She saw that the moments would be few. She snatched her wedding ring from her hand, with its guard of diamonds, and slipped them hastily over the dead girl's finger. The hand upon the dead was even smaller than her own, but it was swollen so that the ring remained in its place. Then hastily she unfastened the pin that held her collar and put it at the dead girl's throat.

On the inside of either ring was inscribed, "Lionel to Brenda, Dec. 20, 18—." The pin was set with tiny emeralds that surrounded a short piece of golden hair. On the back of it was inscribed the old-fashioned word, "Mizpah."

When the men came up to her she was standing looking down sorrowfully upon the silent face. Two policemen came up almost at the same moment, and as they surrounded the still figure upon the wharf Brenda slipped through the crowd and was lost to sight.

How strange it seemed to her! She could scarcely realize that it was really not herself who lay there dead, and another person who walked, alive and well, upon the streets of the great city. She had meant so surely to do it, and then there lay the speechless corpse wearing her rings and the pin that Lionel had given her with his hair in it!

She could scarcely bring herself to understand how it all had happened.

And what should she do, now that it was supposed that she was dead? It was a curious position. She did not doubt for one moment but that her husband would grant her request and acknowledge his son. She saw that as a disowned wife there was nothing but disgrace that she could furnish her boy—disgrace and beggary—and she loved him too well for that.

There was nothing of selfishness in all Brenda's nature.

And yet she felt that she must not go far from the scenes of her husband's home. She must know what was happening. She must sometimes see her child, though she could never press her lips to his, never feel his tiny arms around her neck.

Her heart ached with a poignant pain. Was not death preferable to such suffering? Then she thought, with an awful shudder, of that form upon the river's bank.

She staggered, but recovered herself and walked onward with bowed head. What should she do?

Suddenly she remembered Raymond Bernstein. He had always loved her. Why not go and ask him? Now that she had decided to drop out of the old life for ever, would it be any harm if she retained one friend?

Almost unconsciously she bent her steps in the direction of the house that she had left, and at the corner she met a haggard, black-faced man.

"Brenda!" he gasped. "Great Heaven! what a fright you have given me! I thought—"

"Hush, Raymond!" she exclaimed, laying her hand heavily upon his arm. "I have—come back—to be near you—for ever, if you will let me."

"Brenda!"

"Don't say anything now. I feel that I cannot bear it—quite. I am very miserable, Raymond, and I want to rest."

His pale lips set fiercely. He drew her hand through his arm tenderly and turned their steps in the direction of his home.

"You shall have it," he answered, simply. "All I have, all I am, is yours. It is little enough, Heaven knows, but yours."

"Thank you," she whispered, scarcely above her breath. "You are so good to me, and I have not deserved it. Last night I wrote you a letter, Raymond, and this morning I put it in the letter-box. When you receive it, dear, will you promise to give it back to me with the seal unbroken?"

"Why, Brenda?"

"Because I wish it. If you will not do it, then I must go away for ever."

"I will give it to you."

"Unread?"

"Unread."

"Thank you a thousand times!"

He carried her up the stairs and placed her upon the little bed that he had intended her to occupy the night before. His mother came, but the little form was unconscious.

CHAPTER XII.

It was a long night to Lionel Warrender and Darcy Brooke. It is doubtful which of the two men loved Brenda most, and there was no doubt of the sincerity of either.

Lionel had determined that, let come what might, he had not the right to wrong his wife like that for the sake of anyone, and that he would not do it. He would take her with him; in his father's presence he would tell the truth, and then—

He did not complete his thought, for there was no completion to it. He did not know what the result would be, and he dared not think. There was no thought of love in his heart for Violet Clifton, and in that hour of remorse he had even forgotten her existence.

Almost every hotel in the city was visited that night, but without avail, and at an early hour of the morning Lionel and Brooke separated, with the understanding that they were to meet at the station promptly at nine o'clock.

With the heaviest heart he ever remembered to have carried, Lionel sought his room that night. But sleep was not to be considered. It seemed as though the very look of the bed was maddening to him. He sat down by the window, but the heat of his room oppressed him. He lifted the sash and allowed the cold air to blow upon his fevered brow. His thoughts seemed chaotic. He endeavored to direct them into a continuous channel of thought, but the effort was an impossibility.

He was still sitting there when the door, which had not been locked, opened softly, and his mother entered. She wore only a nightgown over her night-dress, and careless slippers, therefore he did not hear her and did not know of her presence until she placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"Lionel!" she whispered, softly. "Are you more miserable than usual, my son? Has any new horror happened?"

He looked at her and shivered slightly, then shook his head.

"You should not be here at this hour," he said, evasively. "You will take cold. Go back to your room and to bed, dear."

"No. I could not sleep. I have not closed my eyes to-night. Tell me what happened. Did you see—Violet Clifton?"

"Yes."

"And—"

"She consented to become my wife."

"Lionel!"

The hand fell inertly from his shoulders. The great dark eyes were fixed helplessly upon his. Her lips were parted. He never remembered to have seen any face in his life with an expression like that, so filled as it was with

sympathy and sorrow. He rose, and, taking her by the shoulders, shook her slightly.

"I should not have told you that, and you should not have asked me," he said, almost roughly. "Of course I shall never marry her. That goes without saying."

"But—"

"Don't ask me how I shall avoid it, for I tell you frankly that I don't know. I have got to wait and let matters shape themselves somewhat. I feel half mad to-night, and I had so much rather you would not talk to me."

"And I—"

"Don't reproach yourself, dear. It is too late for that now. To-morrow something has got to be done. Will you wait until then before questioning me?"

"Yes, Lionel?"

"Well?"

There was a long pause before she continued. Her head dropped upon her breast, and a curious flush, the flush of shame, had stolen into her pale cheeks.

"Harry Best was here to-night," she said, in a tone so low that he scarcely caught the words.

His countenance darkened, his lips compressed, and the coldness of death came into his voice.

"Here?" he repeated.

"Yes. He came to tell me that he had seen—Brenda!"

"Well?"

"Has suspected that you care for her, and—Lionel, he came to tell me that if you did not abandon her immediately, he would tell the world the story that it would kill me to have told. Oh, Lionel—"

"Curses him!" cried the young man, savagely. "Why cannot he be satisfied with the infernal scheme that he has concocted, without meddling and prying into my affairs? I have sometimes feared that this matter would end in murder, and it has—"

"Lionel, for the love of Heaven, hush! There has been crime enough, sin enough, shame enough, already! Don't ever allow a thought like that to come into your head. It is madness. It is—"

"There! I did not mean to excite you like this. Forgive me. I will always try to think of you, and what you would wish in everything, before I act; and there is one thing that I should always like for you to remember, mother, whatever comes."

"Yes."

"And that is that I have no excuse for you for what has occurred in the past. Your temptation was great enough to excuse any act; and even had it not been, my love for you is great enough to bring forgiveness. But, mother, there is another thing; there is another woman who is situated as you were—"

"Lionel!"

"Brenda is my wife!"

"Good Heaven!"

"There! I go to bed. I ought not to have said what I have, but some power impelled me to it. I am afraid I have not administered a sleeping potion. I am going away to-morrow for a few hours—perhaps for the day and night. Don't fret about me. You know a bad penny always returns. If father asks any questions, tell him that his son is betrothed to Miss Clifton, according to his will."

There was painful bitterness in the tone, and the unhappy mother kissed him in silence. There seemed nothing that she could say either to comfort him or to comfort herself. These horrible words seemed to be ringing in her head, drowning every other sound. "Brenda is my wife!" She repeated them again and again in mental anguish. She turned quietly and left the room, not even wishing him good-night.

Lionel resumed his seat before the window, and remained there for the remainder of the night; then he rose and changed his dress. He went to a restaurant for his breakfast,

and, after choking down a few mouthfuls, he took the tram for the station.

Brooke was there before him.

"I have been here since six o'clock," he said, quietly, "watching all those who came in, in the hope of meeting her; but she has not come. I don't understand it. I felt so sure that she would take this train."

Warrender looked curiously at him. A suspicion that had occurred to him once before entered his mind again, but instead of arousing his jealousy, it only seemed to make his valued friend all the dearer to him; and Lionel seemed to depend more upon him than before.

If Brooke loved Brenda, would he not think what was best for her, even as he, her husband, could not do, under the hideous surroundings in which he was placed?

He knew that it would be so; and therefore he asked, quietly—

"What had we best do, think you?"

"We must go to Rochester at once. I have got a detective to do all here that either of us could do, and perhaps more. He is a man whom I know well and can trust."

For the first time a misty life came to Lionel Warrender's eyes.

"Heaven bless you, Darcy!" he said, softly, as he wrung his friend's hand. "I wish I could tell you the truth of the infernal position in which I am placed; but there are reasons stronger almost than life or death why I cannot just now."

The tone of utter misery, more than the words, touched Brooke deeply.

"But you will go just to your wife, will you not?" he asked, earnestly.

"I will, so help me Heaven!"

"That is well. I have the tickets, and the train is ready. Come."

And as Brenda was leaving that dead body upon the river, the two friends started in search of her towards the old house upon the cliff by the sea.

The journey had never seemed so long to either of them. They spoke little, and then almost in monosyllables, while the train seemed to travel.

Neither knew what he hoped to find there in the old castle prison; but it seemed to them the only thing to do. They got a pair of horses and rode from the little station across the bleak hills down the narrow little road that they had travelled so often.

Warrender shuddered at each familiar thing came upon his vision.

"What a dreary life it has been for her!" he exclaimed aloud with a groan. "I never seemed to realize it before. How could I ever have asked it of her? Only this utter desolation and isolation from week to week and month to month, broken by an occasional visit from me that ended almost in the hour that it had begun! Great Heaven! what an unspeakable agony a woman is! Would I have ever been that for her?"

He cut his horse with the whip to urge him to greater speed. He did not speak again to Brooke until they had entered the grounds, and he was about to throw himself from his horse.

"Where are old Blount and Agnes; do you suppose?" he asked. "The place gives me chills. I seem to have some terrible presentiment of evil! Thank Heaven! there is Agnes with the child!"

CHAPTER XIII.

For a moment Agnes Blount stood, scarcely knowing what course to pursue. The child's arms were clasped about her neck, but she had forgotten its very existence in the unexpected sight of the two men. What should she say to them?

She had arranged no answer to her own question in her mind when both men joined her.

"Where is your father?" asked Warrender hoarsely.

"He has gone to the village," she stammered.

"To the village? When will he return?"

"I don't know. He left an hour ago. You know how long it takes, and—"

"What has he gone for?"

"To send a message to you!"

"About—"

"Your wife."

"What about her? Simply that she has gone."

"You know, then?"

"Of course I know that much, but why did she go? What was the cause of the sudden determination upon her part?"

"I don't know. She was in the habit of going into the grounds whenever she desired to be alone, and therefore I thought nothing of it when I saw her, as I supposed, going out for a little walk. She never returned."

"And that is all you know?"

"Agnes hung her head and did not reply. The baby was making frantic efforts to reach Brooke. The young man took the child, and with dimpled eyes kissed the tiny face. Unmindful of the tablet, Lionel continued:

"Speak out! This is no time to conceal anything. We must know all there is to know."

"There—there was a letter left upon her table, sir."

"Where is it now?"

"Still there."

Warrender waited for no more. He pushed by the girl and went hastily up the long flight of stairs.

He pushed open the door of the room in which he had passed so many happy hours. How still and desolate it seemed to him! He felt as one does in the presence of death, grim and cold and unchangeable. And then there was that horrible feeling at his heart—a feeling of irreparable loss and ghastly unrest.

He saw the letter immediately, and picked it up.

"Dearest Brenda," it began.

It was to her, then, not from her! He glanced at the initials, "D. M.," in the corner at the bottom, and thrust the sheet into his pocket. To be sure it could explain nothing. Never a doubt of Brenda's honesty had entered his heart, and no thought of disloyalty to her honour came then.

He had put the letter into his pocket without consideration, almost without thought; then he glanced about him.

A tender memory seemed to cling to every nook and corner of the room. It seemed to him as if he had never loved her as he loved her at that moment when he so wildly feared that he had lost her. A great, unmastered prayer arose in his heart that Heaven would bring her back to him, and he sat down by the table where she had sat so often, bowed his head upon it, and wept like a child.

Darcy Brooke entered the room while he still sat there. Warrender raised his head, unmindful of the tears that were still upon his cheeks. He arose and took the child, which Brooke still held in his arms.

"Have you discovered anything?" asked Brooke, in a low tone.

"Nothing," answered Lionel, disconsolately, his eyes fixed upon the baby's face.

"The letter was not from her but to her. Can't you tell me, my little one, how to find mamma? Good! Heaven! Darcy, I can't stand this inactivity. I shall go mad!"

"There is no train back before the afternoon now, as we have missed the next morning train, but there will be another one from London in about an hour. We must wait Blount's return. He may have some news. At all events, there is nothing that can be done in town, and this is the most important place to wait."

Lionel groaned. He was watching the baby with a great grief in his eyes, such as he had never felt in his life before. He clasped the little face close to his, and Brooke felt them alone for a while.

"My darling!" the unhappy father whispered, "I have been very cruel to you and your poor mamma, but it is all at once and now. You surely know your own father, do you, baby? He has shown you so little attention, known so little of you; but all that is to be changed from this moment, my boy! You and Lionel—Warrender's son, the child of an honourable marriage, and as such the world shall know you!"

He rested the promise with a kiss upon the baby's lips, and with the child still clasped in his arms he walked up and down the floor, his head bent in thought. He was plotting himself to suicide when he perceived the child there, and he knew it, but there was no faltering in his heart. He would do justice to those two whom he had so cordially thought unwittingly injured, and then he would expiate the sin of another, and that other his mother.

Brooke came in after a time, and found that the baby had fallen asleep in his father's arms. They placed him upon the bed and covered him with a cloak of his mother's.

There was something pathetic in the picture that those two presented as they touched the sleeping infant with such gentle fondness, covering him almost too snugly for fear of cold. They were awkward, it is true, but no woman could have been so gentle as they in their assistance of each other.

There was another pair of eyes watching them through the window-pane, with wide, blue eyes, and the lips of their owner curled with scorn. She turned away and muttered, unheedingly—

"The letter made no impression. He believes too much in his honour, curse that! I don't think he has even read it; but I will find a way yet. I have begun, and I will never abandon the course. I wonder what happened there in London? There is father?"

She ran to the stable into which she had driven the trap. Old Blount was just crawling down from it.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"I sent the message to Warrender," he answered, doggedly. "There was a letter came for you by the last post from London. I don't doubt it is from her. See what she says."

Agnes glanced at the writing. There could be no doubt of it; it was Brenda's.

"Mr. Warrender and Mr. Brooke are here," she said, hastily. "You go to them. I will join you as soon as possible."

She sped away before she could say ought to detain her, and reaching her own room, locked herself in.

With trembling fingers she hastily tore the envelope away. The enclosures to Lionel Warrender dropped out. She thrust it hastily into her pocket and opened the one that was addressed to herself.

She read it twice carefully, then deliberately tore open the letter addressed to Lionel.

"To die!" she whispered, hoarsely, when she had completed it. "To die! Great Heavens! I never thought she would do any thing so foolish as that!"

"Dead? And—what? What am I saying? What am I thinking? I had nothing to do with it. Did I lift my hand to take her life? I am not to blame. What if I did tell her that her husband—"

"Point! I am a fool! She is out of my way now. All I could say or do would not bring her back to life. I am not responsible for her death."

"There is no reason why I should not live out my own life. What good could it do him to see this letter? None. Let me see! Ah! a last favour I request that you give the enclosed to my husband with your own hands."

"That is what she says to me? Let me see! Let me see! What can I do? I have it! I have it! The letter with the miniature of herself that she put about the baby's neck. I took it off this morning to give him his bath, and it is here—here! Ah, this is fortunate!"

She thrust the letter to Lionel back in his

envelope, then carefully concealed it in her bosom.

She took the letter with the miniature in her hand, and unlocking her door, went down stairs.

There was no need of deception, no fear that she would not play her part well, for her face was almost hideous in its ugliness, and her hand trembled so that she could scarcely hold her letter as she entered the room where her father and the two men were standing.

The three turned as she entered, and Warrender, seeing that something out of the ordinary had happened, sprang forward and caught her arm.

"What is it?" he gasped. "For the love of Heaven, speak!"

But if her very life had depended upon it she could not have done it. She opened her lips, but not a sound issued from them. Lionel fell back, apparently unable to move hand or foot, petrified under the fear and horror upon his face.

Then very quietly Darcy Brooke went forward and took the fatal letter from the girl's nerveless hand, and read it through to the end.

Lionel had fallen into a chair. He heard the words: "It is not that I have lost courage, but it is much better for all concerned in this awful affair that I should die."

After that it was all a blank to him. He heard nothing until he felt Brooke's fingers close almost fiercely upon his shoulder.

"Lionel," he cried, "we must catch the train for London, and there is barely time to do it. Arouse yourself!"

He arose and groped about blindly for his hat. The room was as dark as midnight to him, though the sun was shining outside. He obeyed his friend unconsciously.

His very heart and soul seemed dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

It seemed to Lionel Warrender that he had not recovered his consciousness when his friend dragged him from the train at the station.

He remembered not an incident of the journey, he had not seen one face in the crowded train, his lips had moved to speak no word since he had listened to those fatal lines in that pitiful letter. He could not recall even a single sensation that had entered his heart.

Not that he tried. He seemed too dead for that. He thought nothing, felt nothing. He obeyed Brooke without a question, as a somnambulist obeys the invisible power that compels him.

And Brooke?

It is difficult to describe his sensations. His face was white as death. His lips were drawn grimly into a straight, white line. At one moment he felt that he hated the man beside him for the overwhelming grief that he had brought into that sweet, pure, young life, and the next he knew that it was not so much the fault as the misfortune of the unhappy husband, and a great pity filled his manly heart. They were suffering from the same cause, though in a different way, and it appeared to draw them more closely together instead of dividing them.

There was nothing of self-censure in his grief, while if Lionel had been capable of any feeling at all at that moment, perhaps the greatest would have been his wild longing for the cowardly part he had played that had driven his unhappy wife to her death.

The husband knew no hope. He felt that it was true that his wife was dead. He felt that it was the curse that Heaven had sent upon him; but with Brooke it was different.

While the thought was not framed, it was none the less a real one. He believed that there was some cruel mistake. He did not think Brenda was dead, yet of course he feared the worst.

Immediately upon their arrival in London

he took Warrender by the arm and led him swiftly to a cab. He gave the driver a hurried direction, he banged the door after him. Then he quietly turned to his friend.

"You must arouse yourself, Lionel," he said, in an emotionless sort of way. "You may have need of all your strength. It may be, you know, that there is some horrible mistake. She may not be dead, and—"

Warrender shook his head. For the first time a formed idea seemed to penetrate his benumbed brain.

"She is dead," he said, dully; "and her death lies as surely upon my conscience as if I had strangled her with my own hands. The brand of murder is upon my soul!"

"Hush! It sounds horrible," whispered Brooke, through his teeth. "You are mad to say such a thing—to think such a thing! It isn't true!"

"You know that it is! You know that if my hand had struck the blow that sent her to eternity I could not be more her murderer!"

"But she is not dead. I will not believe it!"

He said it with a force that would have seemed to possess the power to bring her back again to life, even if she were dead. He looked at Warrender as if he would compel that belief in his friend, and to his horror Warrender smiled.

He never remembered to have seen anything so frightfully ghastly in his life. It sent a chill into the very depths of his heart. He placed his hand upon his companion's shoulder and pressed it there heavily.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried, roughly. "Do you think you can help it if she is dead? I loved her as well as you did, though she was your wife. Do you think I would not strike you dead with my own hand if I believed that you had anything to do with this—in that way? The affair has been a horrible mistake from the beginning, but the misfortune of it could not be helped by anyone—not by anyone. I tell you that I loved her with all my soul—that I would have given up my life for her at any moment—and yet my lips are silent so far as concern of you is concerned. It was a mistake—a ghastly, devilish mistake! You never meant to harm her, and you have no right to look at anything but man's intentions."

Warrender shrunk back into his corner. His eyes were fixed upon Brooke with a curious glassy expression, like those of a wild animal in the dark. He made no attempt to reply, and almost at the same moment the hansom stopped before a police-station.

"Stay where you are and wait here a moment for me!" exclaimed Brooke, jumping from the cab before he had finished his sentence.

But Warrender did not obey. He got out mechanically and followed his friend in silence, standing white and still in front of the desk while his friend put his quick, grim questions to the sergeant.

Have any deaths been reported since last evening?" he asked.

"You mean—"

"From—unfolds. Yes."

"Yes, several," answered the sergeant, turning to the record. "Unknown man; tall blonde—"

"No! The person I am seeking is a woman."

"Oh!"—casting his eye quickly down the list—"young woman, unknown; dark, curling hair, measuring about five feet six inches in height, and wearing black cloth dress; also plain gold wedding-ring with diamond guard. Both rings contain inscriptions: 'Lionel to Brenda, Dec. —'"

Brooke staggered, and would have fallen but that an officer caught him by the arm. Lionel Warrender never moved. His wide-open eyes were fixed upon the sergeant's emotionless face. His fingers had closed on the rim of the desk like bands of iron; but there was neither grief nor anything else in

his expression. His countenance was as blank as that of a statue.

Brooke passed his hand in front of his eyes. Everything had turned dark before him under threatened unconsciousness; but he recovered himself after that one moment of weakness, and he turned to look at Lionel. He could read nothing in the marble face, because there was nothing to read.

"Where is—she?" he asked, hoarsely, of the sergeant.

"In the dead-house—close by."

A horrible shiver passed over him. The utter ghastliness of those words had never struck him so forcibly before. They seemed now to get right into the very marrow of his being. He trembled from head to foot.

He glanced again at his friend; but if Lionel had heard he gave no evidence of it.

He was still staring into the sergeant's face, in that rigid, dead way that a corpse stares, not a muscle of his body seeming to move.

Much as he loved Brenda, Darcy Brooke had put self aside. In that awful moment he had realised how little and paltry must be his grief compared with that of the man who had been her husband, and who so wildly blamed himself for the terrible fate that had overtaken her. He understood it all so perfectly; he knew so well what was taking place in the bosom of his friend.

If he had not known how Lionel had loved his wife—if he had not known so well how he had suffered during the last four-and-twenty hours, he might have found it easy to have struck him dead where he stood for causing her an anguish great enough for that; but there was only pity in his generous, noble heart, only pity and sympathy for the man who had been almost a brother to him.

He took Warrender by the arm gently but firmly.

"Come," he said, quietly.

The great blue eyes turned slowly upon him, vague and dazed.

Brooke shook him violently.

"If you act like this I shall have you taken home and kept there!" he cried out, frightened by the utter blankness of the cold, white face. "Don't you understand what he said? Brenda is dead! She is at the dead-house, and it is there that we have got to go to find her."

A tremor passed over Warrender. The pitilessness of the tone alone seemed to arouse him somewhat.

"Yes, I know!" he answered, slowly.

"Brenda is dead!"

"Come!"

Brooke dared say nothing further. He did not want a long, sensational article head-lined in the papers on the morning following, and he knew that that was what it would come to if he allowed the conversation to go any farther. He took Lionel's arm and hurried him from the room.

Once a thought of taking him home and leaving him to the tender care of his mother entered Brooke's head; then he knew that it needed a great shock to arouse him from the dangerous lethargy that had fallen upon him, and with grimly-set lips he decided that the dead-house was what was needed.

He kept repeating the hideous word to himself, saying it aloud more than once. He led Lionel back to the cab as one walks in a dream, and told the driver, quietly, where to drive, as they both stood there upon the pavement.

He got into the cab with Lionel, but neither of them spoke until it stopped.

They entered, and to the man in charge Brooke spoke a few words in private. He did not notice Lionel, but followed the man to one of those horrible slabs, from which the sheet was drawn silently back.

The swollen, distorted face looked up at them. Brooke shrunk back, barely able to repress a wild cry, and almost at the same

moment was startled by the sound of a heavy groan.

He turned just in time to see Warrender fall straight backward upon the stone floor, happily unconscious.

"It has saved his reason," muttered Brooke as he bent over his prostrate friend.

CHAPTER XV.

MUCH as he was suffering, self had to be a last consideration with Brooke, and was forced entirely into the background.

It was he who claimed the body and secured a permit for removal, he from whom the undertaker received his instructions, he who summoned a doctor whom he knew he could trust to attend to Lionel, and he who succeeded in keeping the greater part of the details of the affair out of the newspapers.

Perhaps it was just as well; for, while it did not cut the keen edge of his great grief, it kept him from a contemplation of it—which, after all, is the bitterest sting of suffering such as that.

His own bachelor apartments were put at the service of his friend, and it was thither that the body of the unfortunate girl was removed. Lionel Warrender, also, was taken there while still under the long swoon, from which there seemed great difficulty in arousing him.

The gas was lighted and beamed down into the room brilliantly when he opened his eyes. Brooke was bending over him, and it was into the eyes of his friend that he looked first, smiling half dreamily.

"What's the matter, Darcy? You half frightened me looking at me in that odd sort of way. I—" He paused and sat up. A dazed expression came back to his countenance. He was still fully dressed, and that fact seemed to puzzle him. "What's the matter with me?" he asked. "Why don't you say something?"

Brooke motioned to the doctor and his valet, both of whom left the room. Then he sat down beside Lionel and took both his hands as tenderly as a woman might have done.

"Have you forgotten?" he asked, tremulously. "Don't you remember there in the—"

He could not finish the sentence. It seemed too dreadful to pronounce that awful word again. The two men looked into each other's eyes for a moment; then their arms went about each other's shoulders, as lonely women's have done when they felt each other's sympathy, and they both burst into tears.

It was the first dimness that had moistened Brooke's eyes, and they both wept as they had never done before and never could do again.

There was never anything more utterly dreary or desolate than the picture that they presented—those two grief-stricken men with their arms about each other's shoulders.

Lionel was the first to recover himself. He arose, with the tears still wet upon his cheeks, and stood looking down upon his sobbing friend. He knew how Brooke was suffering, and the knowledge went far to arouse him out of his own misery.

"Where is—she?" he asked, brokenly.

"In the next room," answered Brooke, huskily.

"Shall we go there—together?"

Darcy shook his head.

"It is better that neither of us should go yet. You do not want to remember her as she is now. It is awful!"

"I must go!"

"Then promise me that you won't look at her. She would not wish to have it so. You would not recognise one feature of her face."

He went toward the room, but the undertakers were there and would not allow him to enter. He went back, and the two lonely men closed the door, shutting themselves in with their own hideous misery.

One of the men came to the door when they had arranged the body upon its bier. There was an embroidered cloth covering the face, that they had found in the room, and when they had left Lionel alone with his dead wife he lifted the cloth.

A curious shiver passed over him. It was not like Brenda's radiant beauty—that cold, swollen thing that stared up at him—but how could it have been like her when it had lain under those terrible blocks of ice during the long hours of that wretched night? There was a great gash across the face, which would have destroyed all resemblance, if nothing else could.

He re-covered the face as he had found it, and then it seemed to him that it was Brenda again. He drew up a chair and sat down, bowing his head upon the little hand that he had taken in his own.

For a little time his grief seemed incapable of thought, then a great tear splashed down upon his hand. He started as though it had fallen from the eyes of the dead. It seemed to open his heart. He slipped his arm about that rigid form and pressed his cheek to the one beneath the embroidered cloth.

"Oh, my wife! my wife!" he moaned; "if you could but hear me as I speak to you! If you could but know how bitterly I have repented of the wrong I have done you! You would have forgiven me, my darling, if you had but known the truth—you would have urged me to the very course that broke your heart; but I was too great a coward to tell you. I might have known that I could trust you. If I had but had the courage to tell you the truth! But my oath was pledged to silence, and I dared not speak. My darling, can you hear me up there in heaven? They call suicide the unforgiven sin; but Heaven knew your temptation, my love, and it would not condemn you. You knew not what you did. Do you know now the secret that bound me, sweetheart? Do you know that I meant, in spite of all, to acknowledge the truth? Oh, Brenda! Brenda! if you could but speak one word of forgiveness to me, I think I might endure the rest!"

Then there was another long silence, broken only by the sound of the strong man's weeping. It shook him to the very foundation of his being.

He knelt beside her and tried, for the first time since he had knelt as a boy beside his mother, to pray; but the words would not come. That little cold hand which he still held sent a chill to the very core of his heart, and yet he could not put it from him.

There was nothing of it that seemed real to him—nothing save his own wild grief and shame. He threw his arms across the body of the dead and bowed his head upon it. He remained there for hours, whispering words to that little dead thing—words that none but Heaven and himself ever heard, and he was lying so when Darcy Brooke came to him in the grey of the morning.

Brooke leaned forward and lifted him in his arms.

"Come," he said, gently; "you need rest. You can do no good by remaining longer;" and Lionel suffered himself to be led away.

He was very quiet; both of them were. The haggard face had grown old and grey in the night. Darcy would scarcely have recognised his debonaire, boyish friend in this broken, wretched man.

"When does the—the funeral take place?" he asked, dully, his voice as unrecognisable as his face.

"Very early this morning. Drowned people—"

Both of them shivered, and he did not complete the sentence. Lionel had picked up a paper-cutter and was passing it mechanically through his fingers.

"Yes, I know," he said, slowly. "Have you sent any message to—my mother?"

"No. I did not know what you had told her, and left it until I could receive your instructions. And, Lionel—"

"Yes."

"I sent Dawson, my man, you know, to Rochester."

"Yes."

"I told him to bring old Blunt, Agnes, and the—the baby back with him."

"That was very good of you."

"And what you would have wished?"

"Yes."

"They cannot get here—in time, you know."

"It is better not."

Neither of them spoke after that. Brooke left the room after a time, and Lionel knew where he had gone; but there was no jealousy in his breast. His heart had opened to his friend as it had never done before. It seemed to him that all the tenderness and love of his nature, that had not been suddenly aroused for his little son, had been given to Brooke.

He did not know how the hours passed. He could never recall anything definite about that time, but it seemed minutes, not hours, when Brooke came to tell him that if he would look for the last last time upon his wife, he must do so then.

They stood together beside the coffin. The hair was arranged in little soft curls upon the brow, and a spray of white flowers covered the long out the ice had made upon her cheek; but the features were worse distorted and swollen than on the night previous when he had looked upon them.

They both shuddered horribly as the lid was closed for the last time. There were no tears then. The intensity of despair was too great. They were bidding an eternal adieu to the woman whom they had both loved better than their own lives.

It was a singular picture, the husband and the unrecognised lover standing alone, arm in arm, each knowing and respecting the love that the other had borne her, as that coffin was lowered to its last resting-place, and "dust to dust" was whispered.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERY tenderly and carefully Mrs. Bernstein, the mother of Raymond, and Brenda's aunt, disrobed the little creature that lay so silently upon the bed, never resisting the efforts that were made in her behalf.

Raymond had started out wildly in search of a doctor, thoroughly alarmed by the death-like swoon that had fallen upon his cousin, and Mrs. Bernstein had barely succeeded in getting one of her own enormous night-dresses upon the slight figure when Raymond entered with the doctor.

"Has she regained consciousness?" he asked, swiftly, his lined face seamed and old under his anxiety.

His mother shook her head.

The doctor was named to her; then silently he took his place beside the bed and lifted Brenda's wrist in his hand. His countenance grew more serious. Raymond, watching him from the foot of the bed, felt alternate flashes of heat and cold pass over him as the ominousness of the expression became apparent to him. A minute examination followed; then unable to bear it longer, he cried out,—

"What is it, doctor? For Heaven's sake, speak!"

The medical man turned to him very solemnly.

"I don't want to frighten you," he said, very quietly, "but your little friend has not fainted. It is difficult to diagnose the case so soon, but it seems to me that she is in the stupor that precedes brain fever."

Raymond started and became a shade paler. He well knew the danger of the disease—perhaps even over-estimated it—but he was very calm under the awful fear that was upon him.

"It may be that you can help me somewhat," continued the physician, seeing that his words had not upset the composure of the man. "Will you answer a few questions?"

"I will try," answered Raymond, wearily "though it is little enough that I know."

"Has she had any shock, any mental trouble that would be liable to upset her in any way?"

"I think so; though it is impossible to tell you what it is, for I don't know."

"You know, though, that she was suffering from some mental strain?"

"Yes, I know that," replied the unhappy young man, remembering, with a horrible pang, the part that he had played in it only the night before.

"Then we can safely say that it is brain fever. There is liable to be a long and dangerous illness, and my advice to you is that you have her sent to an hospital. She can have every attention there, and—"

"No!" cried Raymond, fiercely. "She shall remain here—here with me, and what there is in human power to do for her I shall do!"

"But—"

"It is useless, doctor," he continued, his savage anger dying away and a dogged determination taking its place. "There is no one under heaven that would or could do for her what I shall. Don't insist upon it, I beg of you. I shall carry out your instructions with my own hands. I shall be responsible for her in your absence."

"But, my dear Bernstein, aren't you the interpreter at the court, as well as a stenographer and typewriter?"

"Yes."

"And don't your living depend upon that?"

"Yes."

"Then how in Heaven's name—"

"Never mind that, doctor. I shall find a way, and I shall have my dear old mother to help me. Leave her to me for a while, and if you see that I am not giving her the attention that she requires, then, if you will, send her to the hospital."

The physician bowed. There was so much pleading, so much anguish in the tone, that he had not the heart to insist further. It could not do much harm to wait and see the outcome.

Once again he turned his attention to his patient.

It was as he had feared. The overwrought brain had received too great a shock, and a terrible illness followed—an illness of peculiar severity and peculiar features.

For days no wild delirium came, only low mutterings and occasional cries, as if the terrible heartache was too acute to be borne. Then, as the case became more pronounced, the mutterings took tangible shape, and Raymond listened with scarcely repressed anguish.

(To be continued)

EVERYONE may not know that the Bank of England notes are made from new white linen cuttings—never from anything that has been worn. So carefully is the paper prepared that even the number of dips into the pulp made by each workman is registered on a dial by machinery.

It is important, when speaking of the longest day of the year, to say what part of the world we are talking about, as will be seen by the following list, which gives the length of the longest day in several places. At Stockholm, it is 18½ hours in length. At Spitzbergen the longest day is three and a half months. At London and Bremen, the longest day has 16½ hours. At Hamburg and Danzig, the longest day has 17 hours. At Warberg Norway, the longest day lasts from May 21 to July 23, without interruption. At St. Petersburg and Tobolsk, Siberia, the longest day is 19 hours, and the shortest five hours. At Tornes, Finland, June 21 brings a day nearly 23 hours long, and Christmas one less than three hours in length. At New York the longest day is about 15 hours long, and at Montreal, Canada, it is sixteen hours.

FACETIE.

ALL the world's a stage—and everybody seems to want the seat with the driver.

Thank 'is always a hand of welcome ready to be offered to the strange umbrella.

A "cyclone" is like a whiff. It carries everything before it.

MAN'S life is a "chicken trial," and all his neighbours are on the jury.

If you want to make a boy work without knowing it, buy him a safety bicycle.

MAN is not merely the architect of his own fortune, he must lay the bricks himself.

This business in which you know you could make money is generally the other man's.

WIFE (severely): "I don't believe in original sin." Husband: "No; every sin seems played out."

It is easier to persuade a woman than to convince her, and a good deal pleasanter, too.

MAN is a good deal like a fish. You know the fish would never get in very serious trouble if it kept its mouth shut.

THERE are people who seem to lose all their religion the minute they can't have their own way.

ALL men do not get their deserts. Some consider themselves lucky if they get as far as a second course.

DAUNKNENESS may be a disease, but its victims seem more willing to pay for the symptoms than for the cures.

THERE is nothing in the world more aggravating to a man with a secret than to meet people who have no curiosity.

MRS TROTTER: "Haven't I seen you somewhere?" Gussie (eagerly): "Quite likely, I—I go there occasionally."

PHOTOGRAPHER (to maiden lady): "Sit forward and look at me and wink if you wish." Maiden lady: "Sir!"

When you open a window on the railway train the first thing to catch your eye is a cinder.

The lady was never stings; but so long as he and his sister are wigs and dress alike, this bit of knowledge will last too.

SURE, BRIDGEMAN: "Pardon?" What do you think of my chair?" Excellent: "They are quite independent of the organist."

STRANGER (as Gory Galah): "What did you lynch that fellow for?" Leader of mob: "He fired at a man and killed my horse."

MANAGER: "What! Are you actually smiling in the death scene?" Actor: "Certainly! With the wages you pay us, death comes as a happy release."

PROFESSOR: "For anatomical reasons, women cannot stand so long as men." Young lady: "I guess you never saw a woman having a dress fitted."

"There is such a thing as carrying a joke too far," remarked Fannions, after he had visited a dozen newspaper offices, at all of which his joke had been received.

NOT to BLAME: "Tommy," said his mother, "did you bring all this mud into the house?" "I didn't bring it," was the answer; "it just got to my shoes and came inside."

YOUNG MOTHER (arrogantly): "Everybody says the baby looks like me." Bachelor brother (amused): "The spiteful things don't say that to your face, do they?"

"Fanny and I were the only two at the funeral, mamma, who did not cry." "Didn't you feel like crying?" "Oh, yes; but couldn't; we had no handkerchiefs."

Mrs. O'Toole: "Good-morning to ye, Mr. O'Hooligan, an' jye the wid' yer for it's a father I hear ye are." Mr. O'Hooligan: "Faix, but the barrat ha'n't been told ye." Mrs. O'Toole, and its more than one father I am when it's triplets bedad."

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Where do you lodge?" Tramp: "I lodge where I get board." Old Gentleman: "Ah! And where do you get board?" Tramp: "In a lumber-yard."

YOUNG LADY: "I want four pounds of steak." Butcher: "round?" Young lady (carelessly): "I don't care whether it is round or square, so long as it is nice and tender."

"Do you and Miss Randolph still play duets?" "No; we gave that up. Our hands always got so mixed up that her mother objected."

"Does time fly as fast as it did before you were married and were merely engaged?" "Does it? One grocery bill alone tread upon another's heels, so fast they follow."

MAUD: "There is so much individuality in Henderson's pictures you feel that he puts himself into his work." Elsie: "Yes, indeed; just look at the air of consciousness that clings to his pictures."

He (sick of it): "Well, I've done. They say it takes two to quarrel; I won't be one." She: "No, that's like you; now I suppose you are going to think all the nasty things you can of me."

"I suppose that there are times," said Mr. Dolfargitt, "when every man feels utterly insignificant." "Yes," replied Mr. Boddle-bonds; "I feel so now! I have some paintings at work on my house."

RATHER INDIVIDUAL—GUY: "Think I'll change me too." Alf: "How?" Guy: "How? The witch asked me if I would rather have me shoes well-shaped or did I prefer a fit."

MR. SUBURB: "Spring is the most delightful season of the year in the country." Mrs. Suburb: "Yes, indeed. All the neighbours clean house, and you can see every one of their carpets."

"JOHN," said Dean Ramsey, "I'm sure you ken that a rollin' stone gathers nae moss?" "Ay," rejoined John, "that's true, but can you tell me what guid the moss does to the stone?"

FRIEND: "Considering that this is your third baby, I don't see why you should be so exuberantly happy over it." Young Father (joyously): "Y-e-s, but it's only one this time."

REYNARD: "He called me a coward, a traitor, and a liar; would you advise me to fight him?" ALEXANDER: "I don't see what else you can do; you would probably lose a suit for slander."

SISTER: "I don't think that girl you're engaged to is very pretty." Brother: "She is beautiful when she smiles." Sister: "Yes, but she won't do much smiling after she marries you."

COUNSEL: "Did you observe anything particular about the prisoner?" Witness: "Yes, his whiskers." Counsel: "What did you observe with reference to his whiskers?" Witness: "That he had none."

CARRER: "Have you finished that bill of fare for the Millionaire Club banquet?" Assistant: "Nearly. What shall I end with?" Carrer (wearily): "Cigars and—obedience."

LITTLE children and dogs are about the only professors of animate nature which may be relied upon. There's more truth in a baby's disfigured smile or the wag of a dog's tail than there is in all the taffy ladled out in a lifetime.

Mrs. TWICKENHAM: "Your son is carrying his own living law, isn't he?" Mrs. Witherby: "Oh, yes; indeed. His father provides him with his clothes and, of course, he lives home in the house; but otherwise he supports himself entirely."

NEW COOK: "I'm told the mistress wants things in the highest-toned fashionable style. Sord, I'm afraid I won't suit for it's only plain cooking I've done." Old COOK: "It's aisy enough. Make everything taste like something else."

TAKER 'EM BOTH IN.—Teacher: "Bobby, how can we reconcile the fact that there have been many, many wicked rulers in the European countries?" Bobby: "Well, the reign falls upon the unjust as well as the just, doesn't it?"

ALCOHOL who thought his life of himself does bludgeon a poem to Voltaire's dedication: "Alia Perpetua"—To Posterity: "What do you think of it?" he asked. "I think that it will never reach its address," was the prompt reply.

THE WAR IT GOES.—"I love to be interesting," declared the optimist, "for I know that happiness is certain to follow." "I hate to be happy," replied the pessimist; "for I know that pleasure is invariably succeeded by pain."

"I don't know what I am going to do with Hattie," said mamma. "She is perfectly infatuated with young Snodgrass. She declares she will have him or nobody." "If looks, then, as though she is to have nobody in any event," replied papa.

TANGAROOT: "Oh, isn't this well divine?" Miss Smiles: "Well, perhaps it is divine; but it happens to be a poem instead of a waita, and the sooner your feet are acquainted with the fact the better we are likely to get along."

A FRESH lady, no longer as young as she once was, but quite as witty as ever, was observed to sigh as she looked into a mirror. "Why do you sigh?" a friend asked. "Oh, dear," she answered, "I was observing how the looking glasses have changed."

"PRAWT'S come over yes, Dintid, ter make ye wurrlack so fast loike?" asked Mrs. Heoligan. "Whifft?" replied Mr. Heoligan, who was painting his goat coop. "Stand out o' me way, an' don't stop me! Ours is strivin' t' git t' rough before me paint gives out."

PURCHASER: "What is the price of coal now?" Merchant: "Twenty-five shillings a ton." Purchaser: "Weigh me out a ton, please." Merchant: "Aber, where the coal is weighed in the presence of the purchaser we charge five shillings extra."

CHARLIE: "I say, chappie! you are wearing a plain black band in place of your gold Albert. You are not in mourning?" Johnnie: "Yes, old man!" Charlie: "Sorry to hear it, old fellow, for whom may I ask?" Johnnie: "My watch and chain. I buried them at the pawnbroker's yesterday."

He (as the curtain falls): "My dear, I believe I will go into the lobby to stretch my legs." She: "You've been to the lobby three times to stretch your legs, and the last time when you came back they seemed real weak. I am afraid you are stretching them too much."

"What did you applaud so vigorously when that comedian made his appearance before the curtain?" asked a friend at a French play. "So folks would think I understood French?" said Spriggins, confidently. "What did he say?" "He said the remainder of his part must be taken by an understudy, as his mother was dying."

"You are going to build a house—are you? What style?" "I have not thought of any particular style yet, but I was consulting the number of my friends to day, and I find I have twenty-nine. As soon as my intention to build a home becomes known, I shall have twenty-nine different styles from which to choose."

He said: "My pride, with a voice as soft as the zephyrs of a June morning, a brain accented with roses and clover, a supple the flutter of angel wings, a heart as pure as a liquid jewel of a spring that none but gods disturb, a love as lasting as the hills." But he did not win her. Then he said: "Say your hair isn't as red as Hannah Smith's across the road, and you have got more sense than she has, say, say." The object of his wooing coddled in his arms a gushing, unconscious source of affection.

SOCIETY.

Let no one despair. Grey hairs are now said to be a sign of great brain activity.

The Russian Imperial family intend spending the autumn in the Crimea.

The latest musical phenomenon in Paris is a monkey that plays the violin.

It is stated in a fashionable journal that 1,000,000 bonnets were sold in London during one week recently.

The Queen of Portugal makes her own bonnets, and graceful ones they are too.

Unless an Austrian gains the consent of his wife, he cannot get a passport to journey beyond the frontier of his own country.

It is a great mistake to buy gloves half a size too small; they make the hand look cramped, and in warm weather they soon become exceedingly uncomfortable.

It is rumoured from abroad that very short skirts will soon take the place of the long skirt for street wear. Some of the great houses are studying new models to bring out which will unite grace, elegance and comfort.

MANY ladies of high rank have adopted the profession of nursing. Among the former are the Princess Helen Cass, who is a nurse in the Children's Hospital at Jersey, Lady Leverhulme Gower in a London hospital, and Miss Godolphin Osborne, niece of the Duke of Leeds, who is Matron of the Lushington Hospital for incurables.

The Hindoo places a clock in his paribut, not because he ever desires to know what the hour is, but because a clock is a foreign curiosity. Instead, therefore, of contenting himself with one good clock, he will have, perhaps, a dozen in one room. These clocks are signs of his wealth, but they do not add to his comfort, for he is so indifferent to time that he measures it by the number of bamboo lengths the sun has travelled above the horizon.

PRINCESS MARIE OF EDINBURGH, the fiancée of Prince Ferdinand of Romania, is drawn as follows by a Parisian writer:—"A girl of seventeen, medium height, round face framed by fair hair, sweet, dreamy eyes, with a touch of Muscovy seriousness. A very firm character, remarkably like that of her great-grandfather, Emperor Nicholas. At Court in England she is called 'the little Russian,' and she is proud of the nickname." Her mother has watched very closely over her education. Princess Marie is an accomplished musician, and not afraid to point out to her father that his notes on the violin are not always correct. Here is essentially a dominating character, and the Royal maiden will suit her pretty head a *merveille*."

Women in Greece, according to a writer in *Blackwood*, "devote much thought to the moral regeneration of criminals, and there are Christian sisters who make this their special mission." The Queen of Greece herself is at the head of the association, not as a mere ornamental patron, but as a directing force, and an indefatigable worker in the "labours of the atonement." All the inmates of the Athenian prisons, as well as the condemned, are constantly visited by the Queen herself and her associates in the private and individual manner peculiar to the movement which is described in detail. After religious instruction is over, according to this account, each lady retires to the room set apart for her use, and the men are brought to her one by one for private conversation, which may be continued as long as she finds it necessary. She sees them quite alone, "a point on which great stress is laid, as it is held that in no country is a prisoner likely to open his heart or speak the truth in the presence of an officer to whose fixed authority he is entirely subject."

STATISTICS.

LONDON has over 700,000 houses in its urban area.

NEW YORK is said to have more widows than any other city in the world.

A POSTCARD message has travelled round the world in 70 days—the quickest time on record.

The average age at which women marry in civilised countries is set down at 25.5 years.

SCIENTISTS estimate that every year a layer equal to fourteen feet deep of the surface of all oceans and other bodies of water is taken up into the atmosphere as vapour.

GEMS.

LEARN all you can while young, for a genuine "green old age" is anything but desirable.

A LITTLE recreation is often as much a rest to the mind as sleep is to the body, and no one expects to live without sleep.

True sympathy is putting ourselves in another's place; and we are moved in proportion to the reality of our imagination.

Nothing is more expensive than penitence; nothing more anxious than carelessness; and every day which is bidden to wait returns with seven fresh duties at his back.

LARGE means are not necessary to the development and exercise of benevolent feeling. Money may be misused in ostensible charities unless it is employed both intelligently and sympathetically.

Do not seek happiness in what is misnamed pleasure; seek it, rather, in what is termed study. Keep your conscience clear, your curiosity fresh, and embrace every opportunity of cultivating your mind.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRUIT, berry, tea and coffee stains are removed by pouring boiling water over them. Do not use cold water first.

STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM.—One quart of cream, one quart of strawberries, one pint of sugar. Mash sugar and strawberries together; let them stand one or two hours; strain them; add the cream and freeze.

CURRENT SHERBET.—Three pints of ripe currants, one pint of fresh red raspberries, two cups of water. Put together in a porcelain-lined kettle, and let them simmer a few minutes; then strain; add two cups of sugar to the hot juice and a cup of cold water. Freeze when it is cold.

SALADS.—To preserve the crispness and flavour of green vegetables for salads; throw them into ice-water for an hour, then dry carefully on a soft towel, being careful not to bruise them, and then put in a cold place until wanted. Never mix any salad with the dressing until you are ready to serve it. Use the coldest of dishes to serve it on, and garnish neatly.

MUSHROOM KETCHUP.—Basket of mushrooms, salt, cloves, mustard seed, allspice, black pepper, ginger. Wash and pick the mushrooms, and sprinkle with salt in proportion of quarter pound of salt to three pounds of mushrooms. Stir occasionally for two or three days. Squeeze out the juice, and to each quart of juice add half a teaspoonful each of cloves and mustard, and of allspice, black pepper, and ginger three quarters of a teaspoonful each. Put all into a covered jar and allow it to heat gently till it reaches boiling point. Leave it to for a fortnight, and strain through muslin and bottle for use. Should it show any appearance of spoiling, boil up once more with a little spice and salt.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The Chinese gardeners are the most expert fruit-growers in the world.

ALL the obelisks in the western part of French Guinea are perfectly white.

MR. EDISON employs two hundred women in the more delicate details of his electrical inventions.

THE fire-brigade of London is called out more frequently on Saturday than any other day in the week.

At Quito, the only city in the world on the line of the equator, the sun rises and sets at six o'clock the year round.

The speed of the fastest railway is not much more than half that of the golden eagle's flight. The bird often makes one hundred and forty miles an hour.

THERE are twenty-five railway tunnels in England between one and two miles long, four over two miles, two just three miles, and one, the Severn, on the Great Western Railway is over four and one-half miles long.

The influence of forests in protecting the water supply is well illustrated in the case of Greece. In ancient days she possessed seven million, five hundred thousand acres of forest. To-day she has hardly two million acres, and the scarcity of water and other injurious climatic effects are traceable to the destruction of the trees.

EYEBROW needles, ready threaded, grow in Northern Mexico and Southern Arizona. The mineral plant furnishes long leaves with sharp-pointed, wiry ends, and when the soft part of the plant is removed, and the fibre stretched out to any desired degree of fineness and dried in the sun, the lucky Mexican or Arizonian has no trouble about threading her needles.

THE highest-priced newspaper in the world is the "Maabonaland Herald and Zambesian Times." It is printed at Fort Salisbury, in Maabonaland, and the price is one shilling a copy. The paper is a daily, and is about the size of a sheet of foolscap paper. The printing is done by the useful hectograph, the printing machine evidently not yet having penetrated into this interesting region of South Africa.

Who wore the first artificial leg? Herodotus (484-408 B.C.) mentions the case of a prisoner who amputated his own foot to escape from his shackles, and, escaping to his friends, was provided with a wooden substitute. In 1885, in a tomb at Capua, a complete specimen of an artificial leg was discovered, with other relics, dating to at least as far back as 800 B.C. This unique artificial limb is now in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

THE question as to which of the great towns and cities, also including London, reads the most, has been answered by Edinburgh, London is a place of much gaiety, and the time given to it is taken from reading. Edinburgh has no such temptations to live gaily, consequently sits at home book in hand. It is, however, difficult to see how accurate statistics have been got at to this matter. Dublin falls off in the contest, no doubt talking is substituted for reading.

It is customary in the town of Quito, when a visitor takes off his hat upon entering a room, to beg him to put it on again; and in the absence of permission leave is generally requested. This, it is said, arises from apprehension that cold will be taken by reminding uncovered. The same persons upon going out of doors take off their hats to flashes of lightning, no matter whether rain is falling; and when the streets are busy and nothing is abundant, a grotesque effect is produced by these salutations, which seem to be regarded as a duty by well-behaved persons, and are performed as punctiliously as the homage which is paid to religious processions when they are in sight.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GOD FOR NOTHING—No; the husband has no claim.
OLD MAID—The duty in 1872 was 61. per pound.

DORA ALSTON—We cannot advise you; what do your friends think?

JOEY—There is no salary attached to the office of Prime Minister.

BERITA—Your best plan is to call upon the registrar of marriages, or write to him.

WORKING MAN—The Night Hours' Bill has not been carried through Parliament.

LOVEL—An Irish peer can sit in the Commons, but not a Scotch or English one.

JUDY—The Atlantic steamship was lost off the coast of Nova Scotia, April 1, 1873.

MILLIE—The highest Atlantic wave is 60 feet, but they more commonly run between 30 and 40, in a storm.

T. S. C.—The "bona fide" traveller is provided for by special clauses in the Licensing Act.

JACK—Persons under twenty-one years of age are disqualified by law from being on a register of voters.

D. H.—A publican has no legal right to supply drink under any circumstances during prohibited hours.

DUNCAN—You can consult no better book than Lecky's "History of England in the Eighteenth Century."

WRATHFUL DICK—A bit is not a legal transaction, and payment of it cannot be recognised in a court of law.

JACK HOBNER—Dr. W. G. Grace, the cricketer, was born at Downend, near Bristol, July 18, 1848.

IN A FIT—You are not legally obliged to pay any part of the sum advanced upon your stolen watch.

T. H.—If you apply to the adjutant of your corps he will compel your sergeant to give you your money.

IMPEACHMENT—A son-in-law is not bound to contribute anything towards the maintenance of the parents of his wife.

LOUIS—It has been declared illegal to sell packets of sweets containing notes, and the same principle would apply to packets of tea.

DOLLY VANDER—A girl of 12 years may legally marry in Scotland; but while that is the law it will be found impossible to put it in operation.

M. L.—Lord R. Churchill contested Central Birmingham against the late Mr. J. Bright in 1885. The Liberal majority was 773.

BUZZETT—Write to Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon Row, Westminster, for date of next examination for outdoor scribbles and scheme of scribbles.

WORKING MORNING—You may refuse to maintain your son of 18 if he is well able to maintain himself, and may use necessary force to turn him out of your house.

THROUGHT—You are always safe in saying madam when addressing a woman, no matter what her rank may be.

A BAD SAILOR—There is no real cure for sea-sickness, but anti-pyrexia is considered one of the most certain preventives of the ailment.

SYLVIA—Catgut is made principally from entrails of sheep; the process could be easily described, but not very easily practised.

MARIE—There are some sixteen or eighteen vessels named "Marie" afloat, all foreign-owned; none of them, however, is in Australian waters.

COUNTRY GOVERN—The name "yoked" applied to an awkward rustic, was originally applied to one who yoked oxen or other animals.

PESTERED—Cayenne pepper is highly recommended for driving away ants. It should be sprinkled around their haunts.

JOHN BULL—The language is Spanish, but there is a large English colony at Valparaiso, and your native tongue will serve quite; cannot name guide.

INDIFFERENCE—The "party colours" vary in different districts. In many places a rosette of red, white, and blue has been adopted by the Unionists.

LOUISIE—A foreigner must be five years resident in this country before he can obtain naturalisation papers; the cost one way and another is about £5.

MARJORIE—Daily practice will improve your handwriting, which is at present only fair in style, though it has the merit of being perfectly legible.

VIOLET—The pumkin stone is by far the more certain remedy: such an application as you suggest would do more to inflame the skin than to soothe it.

ANXIOUS—It is quite proper for the young woman whose friends entertained you to reply, and if she does not do so, you may understand you are not in favour.

MAUDE—An old-time remedy for removing freckles is to dab them night and morning, and, if possible, two or three times during the day, with lemon-juice slightly diluted with water. In putting it on, use a soft, linen rag or else a small, soft sponge.

RIO JAWHERIO—We think the best thing to do would be to consult a solicitor. A letter addressed to the clerk of the church you mention would receive attention. We do not know the fee: it would not be much. You write a very good hand.

W. W.—The waxcloth must be washed with soap and warm water, using a stiff soap; when dry it may be rubbed with linseed oil or ordinary furniture polish.

SALLIE—Lord R. Churchill is only a peer by courtesy, that is no peer at all, but a peer's son, as Lord Salisbury was when he sat in the Commons as Lord Granbourn.

BRIDEGROOM—(1) The banns should be asked in the parish which is the usual place of residence. (2) There are no fees for publishing the banns of marriage.

ONE IN PERPLEXITY—The doctor who has ordered the young man abroad must decide where he is to go; as the special character of his weakness is not even suggested, we are unable to advise.

C. H.—The highest chimney stalk in the world is Townsend's, Glasgow, 454 feet, with 30 feet of corona additional; next highest is at Freiberg Ironworks, Saxony, 443 feet.

OUR WHIPPINGS.

COME, HARVEY, let us sit awhile and talk about the times

Before you went to selling clothes and I to peddling rhymes!

The days when we were little boys, as naughty little boys

As ever worried home folks with their everlasting noises!

Mad, and were we so disposed, I'll venture we could show

The scars of whalloppings we got some forty years ago;

What whalloppings I mean (I think I need not specify,

Mother's whippings didn't hurt, but father's! oh, my!

We used to sneak off swimmin' in those careless, boyish days,

And come back home of evenings with our necks and back aches;

How mother used to wonder why our clothes were full of mud!

But father, having been a boy, appeared to understand.

And, after tea, he'd beckon us to join him in the shed,

Where he'd proceed to tinge our backs a deeper, darker red!

Say what we will of mother's, there is none will controvert

The proposition that our father's licksings always hurt!

For mother was by nature so forgiving and so mild,

That she inclined to spare the rod although she spoiled the child;

And when at last in self-defence she had to whip us, she

Appeared to feel those whippings a great deal more than we!

But how we bellowed and took on, as if we'd like to die—

Poor mother really thought she hurt, and that's what made her cry!

Then how we youngsters smickered as out the door we slid,

For mother's whippings never hurt, though father's always did.

In after years poor father shrivelled down to five feet four,

But in our youth he seemed to us in height eight feet or more!

Oh, how we shivered when he quoth in cold, suggestive tone:

"I'll see you in the wood-shed after supper all alone!"

Oh, how the legs and arms and dust and trouser buttons flew.

What loud vociferous marked that weep: interview!

Yes, after all this lapse of years, I feelingly assert,

With all due respect to mother, it was father's whippings hurt!

The little boy experiencing that tingling 'neath his vest,

Is often loth to realise that all is for the best;

Yet, when the boy gets older, he pictures with delight

The blessings of childhood, as we do here to-night.

Two years, the gracious years, have smoothed and beautified the ways.

That to our little feet seemed all too rugged in the days

Before you went to selling clothes and I to peddling rhymes;

So, Harvey, let us sit awhile and think upon those times.

BERITA—The shareholder in a limited liability company is liable only in the value of the shares he holds; having paid that he is free, the rest of the burden falls upon the directors.

F. T.—You mean the best thing for stuffing teeth? White gutta-percha made for the purpose; it can be had in very small quantity from chemists, who will tell how it is used.

ANXIETY—Write to War Office, Pall Mall, London; give name and number of the man, and ask to be informed whether he is still in health; answer will come, though it may be a little delayed.

C. S. N.—None but a pawnbroking company could legally enter into such an arrangement with you, and, seeing the contract was a special one, they can charge any interest you agree to give them.

DORA—If any woman is anxious to increase the growth of hair in her eyebrows she should clip them and anoint with a little sweet oil. Should the hair fall out after having been shaved, the following wash will do much good: Sulphate of quinine, five grains; alcohol, one ounce. This will also restore the eyebrows when burned and is excellent for the lashes, applied to the roots with the finest sable brush.

ETIQUETTE—Whether or not it would be a breach of etiquette to write a letter in pencil to a lady would depend on the degree of intimacy which existed, also the circumstances which surrounded and influenced the writer. If the lady is a formal acquaintance, to write with a pencil is a great breach of propriety. In any case, if the gentleman has office conveniences, it is in bad taste to use other than pen and ink. Even a typewriter is not thought in good form for other than business correspondence.

MORSE—Large pores in the skin of the face may often be reduced in size by bathing the face in soft or rain water, made quite hot. Wet a large napkin in this and hold it to the face until the flesh is quite warm, then press and rub that portion where the large pores are. Continue this for half an hour every day. Sometimes this treatment will entirely change the appearance of the skin. In some cases the difficulty appears to be in the structure of the flesh, and no ordinary remedy seems to be efficacious.

ANXIOUS READER—For a rush of blood to the head try to get some of it down to the feet. Even in sitting you can use the same device as that which prevents cold feet in a church or horse car; rest the weight of the leg on the toes of each foot. Make as though you were about to walk on tiptoes. This diverts the blood from an apoplectic head, and is found to relieve giddiness or swimming of the head in a few minutes. Perhaps the resolution to send the blood to the toes has something to do with it, as well as the attitude.

IGNORANCE—"Guesito" is from the name of an old Venetian coin worth about three farthings, the sum charged for reading the first Venetian newspaper, a written sheet which appeared in 1570. "Terrier" is from the Latin, *terra*, and simply means a dog that will pursue animals into their burrows in the termite or ant colony. "Muscle" originally meant money given to soldiers to buy salt with. "Muscle" is a Latin-Italian word meaning "little mouse." This refers to its appearance under the skin. "Emolument" simply means an allowance for meal.

ESQUIRE—Of the London detective force the standing strength is about 400. At the head of it is the director of the criminal investigation department at New Scotland Yard. The staff attached to headquarters and in immediate contact with the director consists of one superintendent and about thirty subordinates. The rest of the men are distributed among the twenty-two divisions of the metropolitan police. Each division has thus a local staff of detectives, consisting of one inspector, a number of sergeants, under the control of the divisional superintendent.

MECHANIC—It is said that perpetual-motion machines have been invented, but up to date they have not been put before the public. About thirty years ago a machine was constructed for which much was claimed, but it never prevented its introduction. A wheel was made with axle and what answered to spokes. The latter were made in sections, and either hinged or made to slide or fold back upon themselves. The power was furnished by the spokes which extended on the side of the wheel which was coming down from horizontal to perpendicular. The long arms, heavy at the outer ends, turned the wheel by leverage. Many other plans have been tried, some of which seem to have a little merit, but it is difficult to create something out of nothing.

GINGER—Photographing under water has been accomplished. In 1883 a submarine observatory was constructed at Naples, enabling visitors to see the bottom of the sea. It was a steel chamber, with plate glass doors and a collapsing float to sink it to different depths. It carried eight persons, and was illuminated inside by an electric light, while a telephone communicated with the shore. It was, of course, quite possible to take photographs inside it beneath the water. In 1889 experiments were made in the Mediterranean to ascertain how far daylight penetrated under water. In very clear water near Corsica and eighteen miles from land, the limit of daylight was found by means of photographic plates to be 1,580 feet.

L. T. H.—The closer the ends of the hair cling to the crown when unaffected by an artificial force, the more intellectuality does the owner possess. When the ends, and particularly the body of the hair, show a tendency to curl, it is an infallible sign that the owner has inherent grace and poetic ease of body. The straighter and less yielding—though not necessarily harsh—the hair, the firmer and more positive is the woman's nature. Treachery and jealousy hide beneath lustreless or dead black hair nine cases out of ten. Feminine hair that may appear of the finest texture and be glossy almost to brilliancy when viewed at a little distance, but that on close examination is found to have a broken or split appearance—something quite common in ladies' hair—may be depended on to a certainty as indicating a badly balanced character.

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